

**SHIFTING ENVIRONMENTAL ATTITUDES AND INFLUENCING  
PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR THROUGH THE PROCESS  
OF MANAGING HOW, WHEN AND IN WHAT WAY WE  
COMMUNICATE**

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## Declaration

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## Abstract

Communication has immense power to create dialogue, evoke engagement, shift attitudes, influence decision-making and change behaviour through managing how, when and in what way companies communicate.

Organisations are under pressure to adopt environmentally responsible practices and to communicate this environmental responsibility and compliance to their stakeholders, as a result of the upsurge of environmental concern among stakeholders, in international agreements and in increasingly stringent environmental legislation. This has led to an explosion of “green claims” regarding the environmental practices of companies, or the environmental benefits of products or services, many of which cannot be substantiated or verified. Called “greenwashing”, this is unethical and can lead to irreparable brand damage, negative publicity, loss of stakeholder trust and investor confidence, and a reduction in pro-environmental behaviour, which in turn impairs efforts to improve the environment.

The research objective of the study seeks to understand the role of communication as an effective and practical tool to educate, inform, influence decision-making and evoke values, beliefs and norms in order to prove the hypothesis that *“through the process of managing how, when and in what way we communicate, public relations consultants and communication professionals are in a unique position to shift environmental attitudes and influence pro-environmental behaviour so that a change takes place whereby being environmentally responsible will become the ‘norm’ and not just ‘compliance driven’ because of a policy, code or law or for a competitive edge”*.

Conducted with members of the professional body of the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) via an online questionnaire, the study looks at understanding the current state of environmental communication in South Africa. It examines how and in what way organisations communicate environmental impacts and practices; the characteristics of public relations practitioners and communication professionals communicating these “green” messages; and practitioner environmental attitudes, using the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) Scale. The study also aims to identify the driving factors and barriers to engaging in pro-environmental behaviour.

The results of this study show that communicators have immense power to shift attitudes and influence behaviour. However, communication is currently still focussed on one-way communication channels. In addition, the technical training required to understand complex environmental issues and environmentally responsible practices is lacking in the public relations industry. These factors, coupled with little understanding of “greenwashing” could result in communicators unintentionally misleading consumers with environmental claims that are false, deceptive, ambiguous or inaccurate. This prevents stakeholders from making informed decisions, affecting an organisation’s bottom line and reducing pro-environmental behaviour.

To be the change we want to see in the world, public relations practitioners and communication professionals must realise that their roles as communicators have changed. Communicating environmental messages are not simply a “green” spin on tired old press releases, it is about sustainable communication as a continuous-results driven process of creating and sustaining long-term sustainable relationships between the organisation and its customer-publics (Harrison, 1993:323-327). Public relations can and should assume a more vital role in creating and sustaining longer-term stakeholder relationships that will benefit the earth, its people and the organisation.

## Opsomming

Kommunikasie het 'n enorme mag om dialoog te skep, betrokkenheid aan te moedig, houdings te verskuif, besluitneming te beïnvloed en gedrag te verander deur die bestuur van hoe, wanneer en op watter wyse maatskappye kommunikeer.

Organisasies is onder druk om omgewingsverantwoordelike praktyke in te stel en om hierdie omgewingsverantwoordelikheid en nakoming aan hul belanghebbendes te kommunikeer, as gevolg van die toename in omgewingsbesorgdheid onder belanghebbendes, in internasionale ooreenkomste en in toenemende streng omgewingswetgewing. Dit het gelei tot 'n ontploffing van "groen aansprake" aangaande die omgewingspraktyke van maatskappye, of die omgewingsvoordele van produkte of dienste, waarvan baie nie gestaaf of geverifieer kan word nie. Dit is oneties en word "greenwashing" genoem, en kan lei tot onherstelbare handelsmerkskade, negatiewe publisiteit, verlies van belanghebbendesvertroue en beleggersvertroue, en 'n vermindering van pro-omgewingsgedrag, wat weer pogings om die omgewing te verbeter, benadeel.

Die navorsingsdoelwit van die studie poog om die rol van kommunikasie te verstaan as 'n effektiewe en praktiese instrument om besluitneming te beïnvloed; inligting te deel; en waardes, oortuigings en norme te beïnvloed; ten einde die hipotese te bewys dat *"deur die bestuur van hoe, wanneer en op watter manier ons kommunikeer, is openbare betrekkinge konsultante en kommunikasie professionaliste in 'n unieke posisie om omgewings houdings te verskuif en omgewingsgedrag te beïnvloed sodat 'n verandering plaasvind waardeur omgewingsverantwoordelikheid die 'norm' word en nie net 'nakoming' gedryf deur 'n beleid, kodes of wette, of vir 'n mededingende voordeel nie"*.

Onderneem met lede van die professionele liggaam van die Instituut vir Openbare Betrekkinge van Suider-Afrika (PRISA) via 'n aanlyn vraelys, kyk die studie na die huidige toestand van omgewings kommunikasie in Suid-Afrika. Dit ondersoek hoe en op watter wyse organisasies omgewingsimpak en -praktyke kommunikeer; die eienskappe van openbare verhoudingspraktisyns en kommunikasiepersoneel wat hierdie "groen" boodskappe kommunikeer; en praktisyn omgewings houdings, met behulp van die New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) Skaal. Die studie het ook ten doel om die dryfsfaktore en hindernisse om pro-omgewingsgedrag aan te spreek, te identifiseer.

Die resultate van hierdie studie toon dat kommunikeerders groot mag het om gesindhede te verander en gedrag te beïnvloed. Kommunikasie is egter nog steeds gefokus op eenrigtingkommunikasiekanale. Daarbenewens ontbreek die tegniese opleiding wat nodig is om komplekse omgewingsvraagstukke en omgewingsverantwoordelike praktyke te verstaan, in die openbare betrekkinge-industrie. Hierdie faktore, tesame met min begrip van “greenwashing”, kan lei tot kommunikasie wat onbedoeld verbruikers mislei met omgewings aansprake wat vals, misleidend, dubbelsinnig of onakkuraat is. Dit verhoed dat belanghebbendes ingeligte besluite neem, wat 'n organisasie se sukses beïnvloed en pro-omgewingsgedrag verminder.

Om die verandering te wees wat ons in die wêreld wil sien, moet openbare verhoudingspraktisyns en kommunikasiepersoneel besef dat hul rolle as kommunikeerders verander het. Om omgewingsboodskappe te kommunikeer, is meer as net 'n “groen spin” op ou persvrytellings. Dit gaan oor volhoubare kommunikasie as 'n deurlopende resultate-gedrewe proses om langtermyn volhoubare verhoudings tussen die organisasie en sy kliënte-publiek te skep en te onderhou. (Harrison 1993:323-327). Openbare betrekkinge kan en behoort 'n meer belangrike rol te speel in die skep en volhoubaarheid van langer termyn verhoudings met belanghebbendes wat die aarde, sy mense en die maatskappy bevoordeel.

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## List of Abbreviations

APR	Accredited Public Relations
ARB	Advertising Regulatory Board
ASAI	Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland
ASC	Canadian Code of Advertising Standards
CFCs	Chlorofluorocarbons
CIPR	Chartered Institute of Public Relations
CPA	Consumer Protection Act
CPRP	Chartered Public Relations Practitioner
DEFRA	Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
EMAS	Eco-Management and Audit Scheme
EMS	Environmental Management System
ERB	Environmental Related Behaviour
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
FTC	Federal Trade Commission
GA	Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management
GMOs	Genetically Modified Organisms
HCFCs	Hydrochlorofluorocarbons
ISO	International Organisation for Standardization
NAT	Norm-Activation-Theory
NEMA	National Environmental Management Act
NEP	New Ecological Paradigm
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisation
NZASA	New Zealand Advertising Standards Authority

PEB	Pro-Environmental Behaviour
PRISA	Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa
PRSA	Public Relations Society of America
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
TRA	Theory of Reasoned Action
VCN	Value-Beliefs-Norm
WCED	The United National World Commission on Environment and Development

## Definition of Key Terms

To increase clarity in this study, the defining of key terms are crucial.

### **Co-production**

Co-production is a form of service delivery where citizens act in conjunction with public entities to provide a service (Mchunu *et al.*, 2016: 149-186). It also promotes collaborative relationships between change agents and service users. It also ensures that all stakeholders are kept in the loop as to what is being planned and implemented. Co-production utilises local and personal networks to maximise the effective transfer of knowledge and support change (Mchunu *et al.*, 2016: 149-186).

### **Environmental attitudes**

Environmental attitudes can be defined as an individual's concern for the physical environment. Environmental attitudes are composed of beliefs toward an object, in this case the environment. Environmental attitudes are important because they "often, but not always" play a role in the increase or decrease of environmental quality (Gifford & Sussman, 2012:1).

### **Environmental claim**

An environmental or "green" claim is the communication of the environmental attributes of a product, service or organisation. Claims can be both in the written word and can include imagery, such as symbols, pictures or labels (Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), 2011:7).

### **Environmental communication**

Environmental communication is communication amongst the public, media, environmental groups and corporations that raise concerns and stimulate social debate about environmental issues (Cox, 2010:20). It is a two-way process that comprises planning, facilitation, implementation and evaluation, all of which help in environmental



problem solving (Barnard, 2006:1). It is a multi-disciplinary field of study that examines the role, techniques, and influence of communication in environmental affairs.

### **Environmental consciousness**

Zelezny and Schultz, cited in Sánchez and Lafuente (2010:732) refer to environmental consciousness as the specific psychological factors related to an individual's propensity to engage in pro-environmental behaviours. An ecologically conscious individual or pro-environmentalist is someone who engages in a wide range of pro-environmental behaviours, as well as holds certain values and attitudes that different theories have associated with this type of conduct.

### **Environmentally responsible behaviour**

Environmentally responsible behaviour (ERB) is said to occur when an individual or group who are knowledgeable and concerned about the environment engage in environmentally responsible behaviour or according to Cottrell cited in (Mobley *et al.*, 2010:422) aim "to do what is right to help protect the environment in general daily practice".

### **"Greenwashing"**

"Greenwash" or "greenwashing" is defined as misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service (Gallicano, 2011:1); the actions of an organisation that promotes environmental practices whilst acting in a way that is opposite or does not adhere to the claim that they are promoting or as the unjustified appropriation of environmental virtue by a company, industry, government, politician or a non-government organisation to create a pro-environmental image, sell a product or a policy or to try and rehabilitate their standing with the public and decision-makers after being embroiled in controversy (Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) 2009:1).

### **New Ecological Paradigm (NEP)**

A New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) Scale, devised by Riley Dunlap and colleagues from the Washington State University, North America, claims to be able to measure the

environmental concerns of groups of people using a survey instrument constructed of fifteen statements using the Likert scale, where they indicate strength of their agreement or disagreement. Eight of the items are meant to reflect pro-environmental attitudes and seven are anti-environmental. The responses are then used to construct a statistical measure of environmental concern (Anderson, 2012:260-261).

### **Pro-environmental behaviour (PEB)**

Pro-environmental behaviour (PEB) can be defined as the actions taken in relation to concern for the environment. A person who exhibits PEB is “someone who displays a number of pro-environmental actions across many domains, i.e. recycling, water conservation, transportation and waste reduction” (Markoswitz, *et al.*, 2012:81). PEB has also been referred to as environmentally friendly behaviour, stewardship behaviour, conservation behaviour, as well as consumer environmental behaviour and environmental related behaviour (ERB) (Mobley *et al.*, 2010:422).

### **Public participation**

Public participation is the process by which an entity (be it public or private) “consult” with interested or affected parties including individuals, communities, organisations, before making a decision. Public participation is two-way communication and collaborative problem solving with the goal of achieving better and more acceptable decisions (Action 24, 2018). Public participation is one of the most important aspects of the environmental authorisation process as people have a right to be informed about potential decisions that may affect them and to be afforded an opportunity to influence those decisions (RSA, 2012:5). At grassroots, participation is the ability for participating beneficiaries via their participation, to actually influence, direct, control and even own decision-making and a development “intervention”, be it a programme, a project, a community meeting, a public hearing, community outreach etc.(Theron & Mchunu, 2014:111-128). Public participation is an integral principle that appears in both South Africa’s National Environmental Management (NEMA) Act (107 of 1998) (RSA, 1998a) and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996).

## **Sustainable communication**

Sustainable communication is a results-driven process that aims to create and sustain long-term (sustainable) relationships with stakeholders and the public. Sustainable communication is “continuous, open, interactive, it is consistent, with measurable results, and ever-improving” (Harrison, 1993:244).

## **Sustainable development**

Over the past three decades, the term “sustainable development” has become widely used, most often cited from the Brundtland Report, also known as “Our Common Future”. The United National World Commission on Environment and Development released this report in 1987. The term, first coined in the report, defines sustainable development as “development which meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations, 1987:24). The concept of sustainable development is based on three distinct pillars: economic, social prosperity and environmental protection.

## **Theory of planned behaviour (TPB)**

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is an extension of the theory of reason action (TRA) developed by Ajzen and Fishbein (Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7688). The key driver to this theory is an “individual’s intention to perform a given behaviour, which is assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence a behaviour” (Barr *et al.*, 2007:363). This theory focuses on the gap between intentions and actions and has been successfully applied in green marketing to understand and explain environmental behaviour (Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14136).

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Background

This research is inspired by the following quote:

*“You must be the change you want to see in the world.”* – Mahatma Gandhi

These words came about when a mother and her young son were waiting to visit Mahatma Gandhi. When it was finally their turn, the mother asked Gandhi to speak to her son about eating sugar. Gandhi did not respond but instead asked the mother and her son to return in two weeks. Although not understanding why Gandhi could not speak to her son right away, the mother complied and returned two weeks later. At that time, Gandhi spoke to her son about sugar. When the mother later asked Gandhi why he did not speak to her son when they first visited, his reply was: *“Upon your visit two weeks ago I too was eating sugar”*. He explained that, in order for him to explain why eating sugar was bad for her son, he had to experience it for himself. He had to become the teacher by going through her son’s experience with sugar (Gore, 1992:14). How many of us are prepared to change the way Gandhi changed in order to make a difference to the world?

An increasing number of news stories about deforestation, loss of biodiversity, pollution, global warming and climate change has penetrated our ears and opened our eyes to what seems a bleak and devastating future – not just for us, but also for future generations. Water scarcity and lack of land to support a growing population are high on the agenda and the threat of depleting natural resources gives rise to social and economic issues, such as food insecurity, which is becoming a threat to the development and sustainability of humanity. If not mitigated and managed, the effects of environmental issues will be far reaching, potentially causing severe problems for organisations and people that are vulnerable to change (Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), 2007:1).

Sustainability is not just about environmental conservation. It is the management and sustainability of economic, social and environmental growth. The concept of sustainable development, although still relatively new to many, was first introduced in 1987 as part of

the Brundtland Commission's final report, "Our Common Future" (United Nations, 1987). It was defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Sustainable development where the depletion of natural resources by humans is avoided, balanced consumption is ensured and social resources are safeguarded where human rights to basic necessities exist to keep families and communities healthy and secure, as well as economic sustainability where prudent use of economic resources is ensured (Barnard, 2006:8-9).

The Commission successfully unified environmentalism with social and economic concerns on the world's development agenda (Barnard, 2006:7; University of Alberta, 2010). This concept was further developed into a global plan of action for sustainable development called Agenda 21 (United Nations, 1992:1-351) that was developed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Rio Conference held in 1992). Sustainable development became the foundation of environmental governance (Barnard, 2006:8).

Recognising a need for change, mitigating climate change and sustainable development has become the focus of many international agreements, such as the Kyoto Protocol (United Nations, 1998:2-11) and the Paris Agreement (United Nations, 2015:3-15). More currently, many organisations are adopting the new UN Global Sustainability Development Goals, which were launched in 2016 to help guide companies to achieve sustainability on a global scale. The implementation of 17 sustainable development goals aims to address urgent global challenges in anticipation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is a "roadmap" for people and the planet to ensure social and economic progress worldwide on topics ranging from eradicating poverty to mitigating climate change. It is an integration and balance of environmental, social and economic development in one global vision (United Nations, 2016).

These agreements have had a direct bearing on South African legislation, within which South Africa not only recognises the importance of sustainable development in section 24 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1996), but also makes provision regarding environmental rights for people so that they can become stewards of their environment. The inclusion of this constitutional right has given affect to environmental law that addresses human impact on the natural environment and establishes principles to mitigate the negative effects of environmental issues by means of environmental management principles.

There are a number of environmental legal requirements that organisations need to follow and uphold. Many of these can be found in the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) (107 of 1998) (RSA, 1998a), which is very clear that companies that do not comply could be liable for non-compliance and for causing environmental damage or pollution. Environmental taxation and penalties for non-compliance, remedying pollution or environmental rehabilitation is costly and has a financial implication for a company (Barnard, 2006:4-7). This compliance has become a driving factor for companies to move towards sustainable and responsible environmental practices.

According to Barnard (2006:4), organisations not only have to comply with the growing number of environmental laws and increasing control measures to help mitigate environmental issues, many of these laws and measures also prescribe environmental communication as a key tool for communicating an organisation's environmental ethos, actions, as well as showing them as environmentally compliant. "Environmental legislation has developed phenomenally fast over the past decades and has become an important driver for environmental communication" (Barnard, 2006:4).

Barnard (2006:8) also highlights that "sustainability has become an important governance issue". Governance can be defined as how something should be governed and involves an inclusive stakeholder approach, whereby the legitimate needs, interests and expectations of stakeholders are considered (Institute of Directors, 2009) and where citizens should be included in participatory sustainability decision-making and co-production of planning programmes and projects. According to Mchunu *et al.* (2016:149-186), co-production between beneficiaries (local, consumers, stakeholders and citizens) and public entities promotes collaborative relationships, ensures that all beneficiaries are kept in the loop as to what is being planned and implemented and utilises local and personal networks to maximise knowledge sharing and to support change. This interaction is essential for achieving sustainability and calls for a more participatory and inclusive method of communication between the organisation and stakeholders.

According to the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2)<sup>1</sup> core values for the practice of public participation, the public should have a say in decisions about actions that affect their lives, their contribution should influence the decision and the process should communicate the interests and meet the process needs of all participants. The process should also ensure "involvement" of those potentially affected and provide them

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<sup>1</sup> [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/2017\\_core\\_values-\\_iap2\\_.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/2017_core_values-_iap2_.pdf)

with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way (Theron & Mchunu, 2014:111-128).

Governance gives effect to democracy, which in South Africa has markedly been the case (Barnard, 2006:3). According to Barnard (2006:3), democracy has changed the way people participate, communicate and comment about issues. Participative decision-making, authentic and empowering public participation, two-way communication and information sharing are important tools when it comes to ensuring effective governance and engaging effectively with stakeholders. This helps to achieve co-operation, co-production, interaction and integration that cooperative governance requires, and provides access to information required by environmental law (Barnard, 2006:2). According to Mchunu *et al.* (2016:149-186), authentic and empowering public participation involves the inclusion of local beneficiaries that via their participation can influence, direct, control and own development programmes and projects which should lead to self-reliance, empowerment and eventually and ideally sustainable development (Theron & Mchunu, 2014: 111-128).

An inclusive stakeholder approach can be of instrumental value when it comes to decision-making that is in the best interest of the company over time (Institute of Directors (IoD), 2016:17). It can also help guide decision-makers to identify both opportunities and risks for businesses in terms of three sustainability pillars namely environmental, social and economic.

According to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), good environmental management can only be achieved with the help of communication (Barnard, 2006:11). The communication guidelines set out under the ISO 1400<sup>2</sup> standards, states that environmental communication is one of the crucial issues to be dealt with by any organisation, with or without an environmental management system (EMS) in place (IOS, 2006:iii). Consideration should be given to the fact that environmental communication is part of the organisation's environmental activities in general and should be aligned with other elements of management systems, policies, strategies or relevant activities.

Environmental management systems has a direct effect on communicative action and organisational learning. It has the ability to help organisations assess their environmental

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.iso14001requirements.com/iso-14001-requirements/iso-14001-4-4-implementation-and-operation/iso-14001-4-4-3-communication/>

impacts, make people aware and relate to environmental issues core to the business and enhance communicative action where discussions and debates about environmental problems and how to mitigate them, can take place as a “network, dependent on each other” (Burström von Malmberg, 2002:313-316). Being able to harness the power of communication to motivate employees to subscribe to an organisation’s environmental vision is an important element for steadily improving environmental performance (Barnard, 2006:10,12-13).

Communication has changed the way people think about and view the environment. Public awareness and debate on environmental matters has increased as a result of the media increasingly devoting space and time to environmental issues. There has been a shift in people’s perceptions of, and reactions to, environmental accountability and the environment has become an important concern.

This concern has prompted stakeholders to want to know more about a company’s long-term sustainability goals and the integration of environmentally responsible practices into their businesses. They are also wanting proof of sustainability as well as a level of transparency and ownership of a company to take responsibility for their actions or non-action. The pressure for more information and transparency has impelled organisations to change the way they communicate their environmental ethos and actions to stakeholders as well as demonstrating their environmental responsibility and compliance to their stakeholders by means of communication (Barnard, 2006:1-4).

According to Barnard (2006:6), people are no longer prepared to support companies that they believe are squandering natural, social and economic capital. Stakeholders are seeking value, transparency and deeper insight into a company’s long-term sustainability goals. They want to know that the company they are supporting is not profiting at the expense of the environment or people (Barter, 2016). The “green” consumer is prepared to switch allegiance from one product to another even if it entails a higher financial cost because they are so mindful of environmentally related issues and their concern for the environment is high. “The public’s insight and knowledge should not be underestimated – people are well informed and can exert great pressure on organisations if their concerns are not addressed” (Barnard, 2006:5).

By communicating their environmental initiatives, policies and practices towards the environment, companies are perceived positively by stakeholders and participants and can earn environmental legitimacy. These companies are also less likely to experience



negative consequences from stakeholders and participants, and can influence behaviours and build admiration for the organisation. This will increase sales and profits, the argument goes. As a result, companies are now changing the way they communicate their environmental impacts and environmentally responsible practices in order to improve their environmental rating with stakeholders (Barter, 2016). This calls for a new level of environmental communication (Harrison, 1993:242).

Harrison (1993:243) highlights the importance of businesses understanding “the actions required to place the company and the individual, as manager, in a positive environmental position with their stakeholders”. This needs to happen in conjunction with compliance and regulations that apply to the business. The incorporation of a well thought out communication plan that takes into account the environmental attitudes of individual stakeholders and the overall level of environmental consciousness of a company, as well as a stakeholder engagement plan that can create and sustain stakeholder relationships, will support and add value to the decision-making process, effectively promoting PEB. Gaining an understanding of existing environmental attitudes will help provide information that is important if a company wants to communicate effectively and change existing attitudes (Schafer & Tait, 1986:9).

With an increase of environmentally related news stories, including an increase in “green” business stories, across all media platforms, such as online news sites, social media, blogs, videos, films and documentaries, journalists now have greater freedom and space to report on environmental issues and tell their “green story”. This has given rise to an alternative public sphere for environmental communication (Cox, 2010:160,167,173). It also gives citizens, scientists and activists seeking to influence public attitudes, decision-making choices and ultimately behaviour, the platform to “voice” their concerns and comments, post news and stories and has provided a new research platform for scholars, consumers and those interested in environmental stories (Cox, 2010:152). This new “generation tool” gives citizens a greater “voice” and a “choice” as it also becomes an alternative and innovative space for public participation (Theron *et al.*, 2016:115-147). This active citizenship ensures equity and democratic rights and has the potential to accelerate radical transformation (Theron & Mchunu, 2014 111-128).

However, this new platform also opens up the risk of an increase in unreliable and non-credible sources where little or no accountability exists, leading to fake news and misleading information. If a company is not being transparent and does not provide

substantial information that is useful and truthful, it could lead customer-publics to alternative platforms for information which might be inaccurate, false or misleading.

Very often this misleading and inaccurate information could be as a result of a lack of understanding and knowledge of environmental technical processes and environmentally responsible practices or the accordence of a low priority to environmental issues. For communicators that are tasked with conveying the “green” attributes of a company, product or service, having little or no understanding of environmental issues or environmental law poses a threat to the validity of the article, marketing material, advert or media story as many of these claims cannot be substantiated or backed up by verifiable evidence or reasonable rationale. As a result, this leads to poorly organised or inexperienced public relations efforts, which in turn can create inappropriate or inaccurate green claims that mislead the consumer (Barter, 2016); making connecting with stakeholders and participants, building trust and shifting attitudes more difficult.

As many environmental stories need to be technically accurate, these require training and deeper understanding of these environmental issues and processes. Owing to the fact that few reporters have training in science or knowledge of complex environmental problems and few media organisations have the means to hire such talent (Cox, 2010:160), general reporters are usually designated the task of writing these stories, many of whom turn to the internet news wire stories for information. The danger here, as highlighted earlier, is that the information could be false or misleading and deemed as “greenwashing” and, if published, could cause more damage to a company or brand. Companies that “green sheen” their communications run the risk of irreparable brand damage, negative publicity and a loss of stakeholder and participant trust and investor confidence.

This brand perception and distrust could also be a result of a seeming disconnect between aspirations and real-world impacts (CIPR, 2007:3). What people profess about their environmental responsibility does not necessarily translate into their everyday lives and actions. Companies often profess to be “environmentally responsible” or promote their products as being “eco-friendly”, when in fact they are not. This is unethical and is called “greenwash”. Greenpeace defines “greenwash” as “misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service” (Gallicano, 2011:1). This is seen all too often in the corporate marketing, advertising and public relations worlds, where claims of being “environmentally responsible” are seemingly lacking in truth and not reflected in current day practices.

Many companies enter the “green economy” as a result of legislation, compliance, to minimise risk, increase efficiency, to become a stronger link in the supply chain and better connect with stakeholders. For many companies, reducing their environmental footprint is merely related to decreasing costs and increasing profits and improving their brand perception rather than the motivation of saving the environment. “No matter how genuinely concerned these companies might be, it’s unlikely they’d be pursuing this angle if there weren’t profit to be had” (Gallicano, 2011:1-2). For some companies, the line between aspiration and intention becomes blurred.

The inconsistencies between a company’s actual behaviour and claims about being green “widens the trust gap and threatens to weaken relationships between brands and consumers” (Gallicano, 2011:2,4). “Greenwashing” and a lack of connection between aspiration and intention not only strengthens media suspicions about eco-claims but can lead to a decrease in PEB, which in turn damages efforts to improve the environment. A company is therefore not reaching the authentic meaning of the concept of sustainable development nor the concern and PEB change that is needed to make a difference in the world (Harrison, 1993:245).

Behavioural achievement depends on intent and the willingness to participate in behaviour that is pro-environmental. The aim is the increase of repeated, sustainable PEB that in turn will ameliorate and decrease environmental impact. Environmental behaviour, however, extends beyond purchasing decisions and household and recycling habits (Barr *et al.*, 2005). When it comes to consumer choice of environmental products and services, studies have discussed links between environmental beliefs, norms, attitudes and behaviour. According to Cox (2010:20,23) a person’s environmental beliefs, attitudes and behaviour can be mediated or influenced by human modes of communication, be it language, television, film, photographs or art (Cox, 2010:20,23). Many of the theories relating to understanding the antecedents of consumer environmental behaviour involve theories of cognitive behaviour (Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7685).

Research shows that attitudes influence the decisions we make and can play a major role in affecting our actions or behaviour. According to Schafer and Tait (1986:3), an attitude is a feeling one has towards something or someone and behaviour is any response or action (verbal or non-verbal) to that attitude. The authors further highlight that there are factors, such as a person’s needs, habits, social norms and expected consequences of behaviour that can intervene between these attitudes and behaviours and cause a person to either change or be inconsistent with his or her attitudes (Schafer & Tait, 1986:4-6). This change

can either increase or decrease the quality of environmental actions and behaviour. Shifting attitudes to sustainable thinking, preservation and conservation in terms of nature and the environment is critical to the well-being of our planet. Schafer and Tait (1986:3) indicate that the starting point to understanding attitudes is the relationship between attitudes and behaviours, wherein attitudes are generally perceived to have a primary influence on behaviour.

Gaining an understanding of existing environmental attitudes will provide information that is essential for establishing objectives and is also important if a company wants to communicate effectively and change existing attitudes (Schafer & Tait, 1986:9). This understanding may help decision-makers and communication practitioners set environmental and sustainability goals and determine exactly what, how and in what way to communicate to stakeholders. This information will assist in formulating a sustainable communication strategy that considers how the company can prioritise stakeholder engagement and authentic public participation in order to meet their performance driven sustainability targets, create and sustain relationships with stakeholders, build trust and credibility, and ultimately shift environmental attitudes and influence PEB (Schafer & Tait, 1986:7).

Communication is an important practical and essential tool to educate, inform, alert and raise awareness. It also has immense power to encourage dialogue, stimulate debate, interpret, influence decision-making choices, persuade public opinion, evoke certain values, create meaning and understanding, shift attitudes and shape our perceptions and change behaviour through managing how, when and in what way companies communicate (Barter, 2016; Cox, 2010:11-12, 18-20; Barnard, 2006:12-17).

This study examines environmental communication through the lens of public relations practitioners and communication professionals who have their fingers on the pulse of the organisation's communication. The study aims to understand how, what and in what way organisations are currently communicating about their environmental policies, environmentally responsible practices and compliance. It also seeks to understand the role of communication as an effective and practical tool to educate, inform, influence decision-making, evoke values, beliefs and norms in order to shift environmental attitudes and influence and encourage a change in behaviour, one where being environmentally responsible becomes the norm and is not simply compliance driven. The study also looks to examine the characteristics of public relations practitioners and communication professionals tasked with communicating these "green" messages to stakeholders

including the practitioner demographic profile, practitioner knowledge of environmental issues and practices as well as a general understanding of practitioner environmental attitudes which will be measured using the NEP Scale devised by Riley Dunlap and colleagues from the Washington State University. The study also aims to identify the driving factor and barriers that influence the intention to engage in PEB that contributes positively to reduce the environmental impact on earth.

## **1.2 Research objectives**

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To understand the current state of environmental communication in South Africa by conducting a communication audit among members of PRISA to examine the way organisations are communicating about the current processes, tools and modes of communication that the practitioner uses to communicate the company or their client's environmental impact, practices services or products to stakeholders as well as the level of transparency companies are communicating these messages.
2. To explore the characteristics of practitioners tasked to communicate these environmental messages by determining the demographic profile of practitioners, the level of knowledge pertaining to environmental issues and environmentally responsible practices as well as the priorities and perceptions of practitioners regarding these environmentally responsible practices.
3. To determine and describe the current general level of environmental beliefs and attitudes of practitioners by using Dunlap's NEP Scale as well as gaining a better understanding of the impact communication has had on shifting stakeholder attitudes and PEB by means of environmental impact or behaviour change communication campaigns.
4. To tabulate and analyse the results of the above objectives in order to investigate the relationship between environmental communication and environmental attitudes. This will determine if current communication methods are influencing environmental attitudes and bringing about PEB.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

According to Brynard, Brynard and Hanekom (2014:18), a problem statement is a statement that provides a vast amount of information regarding a topic of interest in a few words. It identifies the problems that lead to the study being undertaken and is the starting point of departure. It is a signpost that guides the research and the planning process (Cresswell, 2003:105).

This study will seek to address the research problems detailed below.

#### **1.3.1 Lack of stakeholder engagement, sustained dialogue and participation**

Most businesses place attention on compliance, environmental performance and meeting regulatory requirements and sustainability targets, rather than creating relations and sustaining dialogue with stakeholders and participants (employees, consumers and community); providing them with substantial information that is useful and truthful or feedback to make informed decisions; and including stakeholders in the decision-making process when formulating environmental and sustainability initiatives for a company (Harrison, 1993).

A top-down, technocentric approach to dialogue and decision-making, where little to no stakeholder engagement or public participation takes place, can leave stakeholders, including employees, feeling disregarded and misunderstood. Not taking the legitimate needs and environmental concerns of stakeholders into account can leave them feeling discontent and disconnected. What many companies do not realise is that stakeholders' concerns are often leading indicators of what may become financially material to a company in the future (Mohin & Rogers, 2017).

If employees do not feel that their company is taking care of them, they lose commitment to the engagement. The same can be said of external stakeholders. They will support a company because they understand that what they are doing is good (Brubaker, 2016). However, more often than not the one-way flow of information being communicated, or not being communicated, does not provide a level of understanding or relevant information for stakeholders to make an informed decision. The inability to provide relevant information related to the business to stakeholders could be as a result of a lack of management buy-in and the scepticism of management of their stakeholders' interest in environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues.

For many organisations, the cost and time it takes to engage with stakeholders is a challenging issue but it can also be quite costly not to provide a fair and balanced reflection of public opinion. According to Barnard (2006:116) and Cox (2010:26-32), having a balanced representation of stakeholders is important. This includes staff, stakeholders, investors, government, consumers, community, scientists, media and even environmental groups. Although a costly exercise, companies cannot afford not to engage with stakeholders. A lack of stakeholder engagement and public participation in the decision-making process will make it challenging for companies to create dialogue, better connect, communicate their message, and persuade and influence environmental attitudes and behaviours (Schafer & Tait, 1986:7).

### **1.3.2 Lack of trust and transparency when communicating environmental impacts**

Companies have for many years exploited the consumers' lack of knowledge and understanding of environmental issues and technical claims owing to the limited access of substantial information and lack of transparency that exists regarding a company's sustainable business practices. Many organisations have been able to portray themselves as "environmental stewards" or claim to be concerned about environmental issues, when in fact many are not.

Due to the increased awareness of environmental issues and the shift in environmental attitudes among stakeholders, concern now exists that companies are motivated by saving and/or making money or increasing their brand reputation rather than saving the environment. What companies profess to say about their environmental responsibility does not seemingly translate into their everyday actions. There is concern that behind the splashy "environmentally friendly" campaigns, little is actually being done to protect the environment (Gallicano, 2011:2-3). As a result of increased environmental concern, stakeholders are demanding more information and proof of sustainability, particularly with regard to the environment. Trust and transparency have become key to communication strategies.

According to the 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer, trust levels in all four institutions, namely business, government, NGOs and the media have fallen below 50 percent. Media declined the most, with 82 percent of surveyed countries showing distrust. For the first time, the Edelman Trust Barometer also showed that NGOs have fallen to nearly the same level as trust in business. Aiding this distrust is the lack of credibility of leadership. Only 37 percent



of the general population now say CEOs are credible and 29 percent say the same about government officials (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2017:3-4). This has a direct impact on environmental communications and the reputation of being an environmental steward for many companies.

Corporate reputation is based on stakeholder perception. In order to build trust and goodwill with these stakeholders and to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace, companies and organisations have to establish a positive environmentally responsible reputation by visibly demonstrating their commitment to sustainability objectives.

Instilling confidence in stakeholders requires a level of trust, which is built on emotional factors, such as ethical values, honesty and integrity. This can be a challenging task, particularly when it comes to stakeholder engagement and public participation as most publics have little confidence in these processes and do not believe that they will be heard (Barnard, 2006:115). This can be translated into any form of stakeholder engagement where stakeholders' legitimate needs are not taken into consideration in the decision-making process, and they do not feel valued or heard, and so the trust gap widens.

In order to overcome this challenge, businesses today understand that their success depends on good relationships with both internal and external stakeholders. To achieve this, public relations practitioners and communication professionals need to ensure open, honest and transparent communication as this will help build trust and makes for good relationships with the authorities, media and stakeholders (Barnard, 2006:115; Gallicano, 2011:2). Failure to do so could result in the reputation of the company being harmed and a disconnect between stakeholders and the company.

### **1.3.3 Lack of understanding of environmental issues and processes**

The communicating of environmental processes and issues involves a number of technical related jargon, which for many sustainability directors or managers, is challenging to communicate to a layman. Often, "green" stories can become lost in translation. This could be owing to a lack of understanding and low levels of knowledge of technical processes and environmental issues.

This lack of understanding can be further extended to public relations practitioners and communication professionals who are tasked to create and communicate these "green stories" and claims, respond to environmental concerns of stakeholders, and provide



reliable information, sound analysis and ethical recommendation on sustainable environmental communication; yet most will have had little or no environmental training (Hickerson & Bsumek, 2013:1-2). For most, awareness exists around common pro-environmental activity, such as recycling, but a deeper level of understanding of environmental issues, such as the effects of pollution or the technical processes behind recycling, is lacking (Hickerson & Bsumek, 2013:8).

A lack of understanding of environmental issues, ignorance of environmental law and even over enthusiasm to communicate before all proof points are in place, can lead to the communication and/or promotion of false or misleading claims (CIPR, 2007:3) which poses a threat to the validity of the environmental message. This lack of understanding can also be extended to journalists and the media where few reporters have training in science or knowledge of complex environmental problems and few media organisations have the means to hire such talent (Cox, 2010:160). As many environmental stories need to be technically accurate, a lack of training and deeper understanding of these environmental issues and processes could result in false or misleading information being published, which could cause more damage to a company or brand widening the distrust gap and the intent to change behaviour and take action.

Poorly organised or inexperienced public relations efforts can create inappropriate or inaccurate “green claims” that mislead the consumer (Barter, 2016). This results in committing “greenwash” or “greenwashing”, not out of malice, but due to ignorance (Hickerson & Bsumek, 2013:2). Although a company might be enthusiastic about, and good at environmentally responsible practice, poor public relations communication efforts could “result in an industry leader being accused of greenwashing, despite a better sustainability record than competitors” (CIPR, 2007:3).

#### **1.3.4 “Greenwash”, unsupported, false and misleading environmental claims**

One of the biggest barriers to shifting attitudes and encouraging PEB is the unethical issue of “greenwash” as defined earlier in the Chapter, the “act of misleading consumers regarding environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service” (Gallicano, 2011:1). The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) defines “greenwash” as the actions of an organisation that promote environmental practices whilst acting in a way that is opposite or does not adhere to the claim that they are promoting. SourceWatch (PRSA, 2009:1) defines “greenwashing” as the unjustified appropriation of

environmental virtue by a company, industry, government, politician or even a non-government organisation to create a pro-environmental image, sell a product or a policy or to try and rehabilitate their standing with the public and decision-makers after being embroiled in controversy.

“Greenwash” can occur owing to a company’s need to keep ahead of their competitors, to differentiate their product in the “green economy” and to portray good environmental stewardship. As a result, environmental attributes of a product can be exaggerated, causing consumers to believe that the company or product is “environmentally sound”. “Greenwash” can be found mostly in general environmental claims such as “eco-friendly”, “green”, or “non-polluting”, which are vague or ambiguous. Some companies cause “greenwash” in an attempt to enhance their brand value and reputation by making false or inaccurate social and environmental claims (CIPR, 2007:4). Some ways that “greenwashing” is portrayed is “by changing the name, or label, of a product to give it a ‘feeling of nature’ i.e. putting a photograph of a forest on a bottle of harmful chemicals. It can also detract from negative practices in other parts of a company’s business” (CIPR, 2007:3).

According to Harrison (1993:245), making claims about a company’s “green” commitment that is not supported by scientific or verifiable evidence can be defined as “unsustainable communication”. Companies that intentionally “green sheen” their environmental communications run the risk of irreparable brand and reputational damage, negative publicity and loss of trust and confidence among stakeholders and investors (Barter, 2016). This in turn can affect stakeholder and participant attitudes and their behaviour towards their concern for not only the company but also the environment. As attitude is a strong predictor of behaviour, this could result in a decrease or loss of the PEB needed to make a difference to the world.

The exponential increase of “green stories” and environmental claims, can leave consumers feeling overwhelmed and confused over what it means to be “green” and become “unsure of these messages and have a hard time discerning true claims from those that are just ‘greenwashing’” (TerraChoice, 2010; Gallicano, 2011:4). The inconsistencies between a company’s actual behaviour and claims about being “green” widens the trust gap and threatens to weaken relationships between brands and consumers” (Gallicano, 2011:2,4). This lack of connection between aspiration and intention not only strengthens stakeholder suspicions that companies are not being truthful about

their environmental ethos, actions and the claims they are making which can lead to a decrease in PEB, which in turn damages efforts to improve the environment.

If the culture of the organisation does not place a high value on honesty, transparency and trust, “greenwashing” is more likely to occur. Organisations or public relations practitioners that are not open, honest and transparent in their communication of sustainable environmental messages and mislead stakeholders with false, exaggerated or misleading claims “could find themselves criticised publicly for attempting to utilise sustainability for public relations purpose, which can hugely damage corporate and individual reputations” (CIPR, 2007:3,6). In other words, the tail to wag the dog.

With consumers seeking authenticity in companies’ marketing and environmental claims (Gallicano, 2011:4), public relations practitioners should avoid “greenwashing” at all costs and take responsibility for questioning client claims if they believe them to be untrue or inaccurate (CIPR, 2007:3).

## **1.4 Research hypothesis**

### **1.4.1 Introduction**

A hypothesis according to Bless and Higson-Smith (1995) cited in Brynard *et al.* (2014:23), is a suggested and preliminary answer to a problem. According to De Wet *et al.* (1981), cited in Brynard *et al.* (2014:23), a hypothesis should explain the relationship between at least two variables, as is reflected in this study between “environmental communication” and “environmental attitudes”. The hypothesis should also be able to test the relationship. Before it can be incorporated into theory, it needs to be tested and proven (Bless *et al.*, 2013:83). A hypothesis serves as a point of departure and forms the backbone of the research process as it acts as the “golden thread” as the study develops (Brynard *et al.*, 2014:87).

### **1.4.2 Problem leading to the hypothesis**

Communication has the potential to both shift consciousness and influence attitudes and behaviour. A low priority accorded to the environment, lack of stakeholder engagement and participation in sustainability decision-making, lack of transparency and the provision of substantial information that is useful to make informed decisions as well as the lack of

knowledge of environmental issues and practices and the understanding of the general environmental attitudes and beliefs of stakeholders could lead to poor or ineffective communication while promoting the environmental attributes or actions of a product or company. This can lead to increased false claims being communicated, which can turn into reputational damage, negative publicity, loss of trust and confidence (Barter, 2016) among stakeholders and potentially a decrease of ecologically conscious or pro-environmental behaviours. By understanding the environmental consciousness of individuals, communication professionals are able to manage how, when and in what way they communicate in order to influence individual PEBs.

### **1.4.3 Hypothesis**

The hypothesis of the study is as follows:

“Through the process of managing how, when and in what way we communicate, public relations consultants and communication professionals are in a unique position to shift environmental attitudes and influence PEB so that change takes place whereby being environmentally responsible will become the ‘norm’, and not just ‘compliance driven’ because of a policy, code, law or for a competitive edge.”

## **1.5 Research design and methodology**

### **1.5.1 Introduction**

With the purpose of testing a specific hypothesis, a research design is defined by Bless *et al.* (2013:130) and Webb and Auriacombe (2006:589) as a “roadmap” that the researcher uses to collect specific data and analysis in order to test the hypothesis and to ensure that it adequately addresses the research questions (Bless *et al.*, 2013:131). A research design provides a guideline of how the study will be conducted, while the research methodology is the technique used to collect the data. Instruments such as attitude and rating scales can be utilised to test the data validity (Brynard *et al.*, 2014:37).

This study’s design and methodology will follow a mixed-method approach consisting of both qualitative and quantitative data. The aim of the study is to acquaint the researcher

with the topic and to help the researcher gain a broader understanding of the situation or phenomenon at hand (Babbie, 2010:92). This study will explore the link between communication as a tool to shift attitudes and influence PEB as stated in the above hypothesis.

A quantitative research method will be used in the form of secondary content analysis followed by a semi-structured questionnaire. Data will be collected via a national survey of members of the professional group Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA), which currently promotes and communicates sustainability initiatives on behalf of clients or companies.

### **1.5.2 Secondary content analysis**

According to Babbie (2010:288), secondary analysis is a collection of expert information sources from other authors of books, journal articles and newspaper articles, whereby information and data is collected that adds to a better understanding of the research problem.

In this study, the researcher aims to assimilate existing and relevant literature on current documentation pertaining to sustainable environmental communication as well as current theories that pertain to the measurement of environmental concern and attitudes. A content analysis of current environmental topics and environmentally responsible practices will be conducted. The information collected should provide sufficient direction for compiling an online questionnaire.

### **1.5.3 Online questionnaire**

A semi-structured online questionnaire will be used as a mechanism to collect data. A questionnaire according to Babbie (2010:256), is a document that consists of both questions and statements that are used to seek information, data and statistics applicable for the study at hand. This method was adopted because it allows the researcher to determine respondents' perceptions of particular aspects of the research question.

The following instruments will be used in the development and utilisation of the questionnaire in the current study.

### **1.5.3.1 Communication audit**

The researcher will compile an online questionnaire based on a previous survey conducted by Bortree (2011b) that will focus on understanding how organisations communicate about their corporate environmental responsible practices by identifying the current level of practitioner knowledge and understanding of environmental issues and environmentally responsible practices, the communication channels used to communicate environmental initiatives and environmentally responsible practices, as well as identifying the level of priority afforded and should be afforded to environmental issues and practices. In addition to Bortree's (2011b) survey, the survey will also determine if practitioners have participated in environmental impact or change behaviour communication campaigns, and from that data establish whether there was a shift in attitudes and a change in behaviour as a result of the communication.

### **1.5.3.2 New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) scale**

To establish a general benchmark of current general environmental beliefs and environmental attitudes of public relations practitioners and communication professionals, the use of the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) Scale, devised by Riley Dunlap and colleagues from the Washington State University, in North America will be incorporated as part of the online survey. The NEP scale will form part of the key methodology of the study and is set to be able to measure the environmental concerns of groups of people using a survey instrument constructed of 15 statements that reflect pro-environmental or anti-environmental attitudes (Anderson, 2012:260). The NEP scale has become the most widely used measure of an "ecological" worldview (Dunlap *et al.*, 2000:427). Furthermore, the scale is considered to be internally consistent and is currently used to assess the relationship of environmental worldviews or attitudes on public policy to PEBs (Anderson, 2012:260-261).

### **1.5.3.3 Administration of the questionnaire**

The survey was conducted using Survey Monkey, a reputable online survey platform. It was conducted amongst members of the professional organisation, Public Relations

Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA). Participants were sent an email from PRISA with a link to an online questionnaire. Upon completion of the questionnaire, respondents were offered a copy of the final report. Follow-up emails to encourage participation was sent as needed. This questionnaire was voluntary and respondents were free to decline to participate or withdraw from the survey at any point. The online questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes to complete.

All information and responses to the survey was anonymised as part of the survey results data set. All personal information and survey data complied with the highest levels of confidentiality and best practice in privacy and security standards offered by Survey Monkey. The Stellenbosch Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities) reviewed and approved the survey study thus granting ethical clearance.

#### 1.5.3.4 Analysis of data

The questionnaire had a deadline. Respondents were notified that they will be the first to receive the results of the questionnaire. Once feedback had been received from the respondents, an analysis of the completed questionnaires was conducted using Survey Monkey's reputable statistical software programme. This made it possible to examine the data with fewer mistakes.

A high level of response was expected in terms of pro-environmental attitudes, alongside a low level of knowledge of environmental issues, process and environmentally responsible practices. The data would also establish whether there was a shift in attitudes and a change in behaviour as a result of the communication. However, it was suspected that environmental behaviours are not currently being measured.

To date, a survey of this nature has not been conducted amongst public relations practitioners in a South African context. Results of this study will contribute to the public relation industry's understanding of the current state of environmental communication among organisations. Having a greater understanding of the current state of environmental communication among public relations practitioners could prove to be an invaluable tool in streamlining current messages and channels to help shift attitudes to sustainable thinking, preservation and conservation in terms of the nature and the environment, which is critical to the well-being of our planet.

## CHAPTER 2: LEGISLATION GOVERNING ENVIRONMENTAL CLAIMS

### 2.1 Introduction

South Africa is rich in terms of legislation that protects both its people and the environment, it recognises the importance of international law, makes provision regarding the environmental rights of the public, promotes conservation and believes sustainable development to be intrinsic to social, economic and ecological development.

South Africa recognises the importance of international law under Chapter 14 of the Constitution (RSA, 1996). According to Section 231, South Africa is bound to international agreements, especially those that were in place when the Constitution took effect. It also states in Section 233 that, “when interpreting any legislation, every court must prefer any reasonable interpretation of the legislation that is consistent with international law over any alternative interpretation that is inconsistent with international law” (RSA, 1996). Provision for international law has also been made in Section 39(1)(b) of the Bill of Rights under the Constitution whereby it is stated that a court, tribunal or forum “must consider international law” (RSA, 1996).

In line with international agreements and sustainable development, the Constitution (RSA, 1996) also makes provision regarding the environmental rights of the public. According to Section 24(a), “Everyone has the [constitutional] right to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being; and (b) to have the environment protected, for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that (i) prevent pollution and environmental degradation, (ii) promote conservation, and (iii) secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development” (RSA, 1996).

The Constitution (RSA, 1996) recognises the importance of protecting its people and the environment that surrounds them and grants certain rights to people so that they can become stewards of their environment. The Constitution (RSA, 1996) puts people first by taking measures to protect the environment while securing economic and social development, the pillars of sustainable development as defined in the Brundtland Report, “Our Common Future” (1987) for present and future generations. The inclusion of this constitutional right has given effect to environmental law, which addresses human impact



on the natural environment and how to mitigate the negative effects of environmental issues by means of environmental management.

The adoption and integration of environmental management can be seen in South Africa's National Environmental Management Act (107 of 1998) (NEMA) (RSA, 1998a) a progressive legislation that addresses human impact on the natural environment and mitigating the negative effects of environmental issues including pollution, resource depletion, biodiversity loss, deforestation, water scarcity and protection of both marine life and land by establishing principles and standards to promote effective environmental management and ensure and promote co-operative governance (RSA, 1998). These principles, which are aligned to sustainable development, aim to ensure that through planning, implementation and evaluation of decisions the environment is protected, resources are not depleted and people's primary economic and social concerns are not compromised now, or in the future (Barnard, 2006:8).

To ensure environmental protection takes place, organisations are compelled by legislation to change the way they do business in order to reduce their impact on the environment. Industry now has specific environmental obligations they must meet in order to address and mitigate negative impacts on the natural environment in line with numerous Acts within the NEMA including the Waste Act (59 of 2008); Air Quality Act (39 of 2004); Biodiversity Act (10 of 2004); Protected Areas Act (57 of 2003); National Forests Act (84 of 1998); National Water Act (36 of 1998) and the Marine Living Resources Act (18 of 1998). Non-compliance of these Acts is seen as a serious offence and companies need to follow prescribed environmental procedures so as not to break the law and face penalties. Barnard (2006:4) warns that environmental legislation is growing and will have serious implications for organisations that do not comply or follow prescribed environmental procedures or continue with practices that damage the environment.

Compliance has become a driving factor for companies to move towards sustainable and responsible environmental practices and adopt strategies, such as lowering greenhouse gas emissions, conserving water, minimising waste and using energy more efficiently. Owing to the fact that environmental legislation has grown phenomenally over the past decades, companies now not only have to comply with growing environmental laws and control measures within their sectors, they also have to comply with increased measures that prescribe environmental communication (Barnard, 2006:4) as a result of stakeholders seeking transparency and more information about a company's long-term sustainability goal. The more an organisation communicates their environmental compliance and

initiatives, the better they are seemingly perceived by stakeholders and in some way seem to earn environmental legitimacy.

In order to communicate and create awareness of their environmentally responsible strategies, compliance to industry standards and codes as well as environmental claims effectively, companies employ the services of marketers, advertising agents, public relations practitioners and communication professionals. The promotion of environmental claims or singling out the environmental attributes of a product is one such marketing and communication tool used to create this awareness and capture the attention of their “environmentally conscious” target audience.

The promotion of environmental claims implies that the product is less harmful or has less environmental impact than other products, services or companies within the same industry, category or class. Environmental claims are used to inform and educate the customer public about a company’s environmental impact and compliance status and are also used inadvertently in the marketing and advertising of products or activities by means of statements, labelling, logos and images in order to boost sales.

According to the Advertising Regulatory Board (ARB) (2019) of South Africa, an environmental claim is any product, packaging or service claim, representation, reference or indication, whether it is direct or not, that appears in an advertisement that has an immediate or future impact or influence on the environment. These environmental claims are increasingly being used to communicate the environmental attributes of a product, service or organisation by means of the written word and/or imagery, such as symbols, pictures or labels (DEFRA, 2011:7). Many times, environmental claims, used extensively in advertising, marketing and communication material, are portrayed by implying environmental benefits or portraying the “feeling of nature” by means of images, words or symbols on product packaging and labelling (CIPR, 2007:2,3; McLaughlin & Frause, 2009,1; How Does the New Consumer Protection Act Impact on You?, 2016). Examples of environmental claims being communicated may relate to general environmental impacts to air, water, and emissions and include claims, such as biodegradable, compostable, organic, and recyclable.

With an increase of companies entering the “green economy”, the use of environmental claims has grown exponentially. This has also led to an increase of false and deceptive claims or an exaggeration of environmental claims aimed at misleading the “green” consumer into thinking a product or service is environmentally sound when in fact it is not

in order. Misleading consumers into thinking that their product is environmentally sound in order to capture the attention of their target audience is unethical and known as “greenwashing” as defined in Chapter 1.

Terrachoice, an Environmental Marketing agency based in the United States, conducted a study after purchasing 2 219 products that displayed environmental claims. In total, 4 996 environmental claims were made, of which 98 percent were identified as false, misleading or vague (McLaughlin & Frause, 2009:1). Ogilvy Earth South Africa conducted a similar study by means of an online sustainability survey in 2011. The online survey, designed to assess people’s environmental attitudes and awareness of environmental issues was completed by 800 individuals between the ages of 26 and 45 years over a seven-month period. When asked about “greenwashing”, 36.6 percent agreed that green claims were merely a money spinner, 38 percent were on the fence and 40.7 percent were unsure whether a brands green credentials could be trusted (Green Business Guide, 2011; Baird, 2011).

Misleading consumers is not a new phenomenon. As previously discussed in Chapter 1, many organisations have been able to portray themselves as “environmental stewards” or promote environmental claims that are not true because they have been able to exploit the consumer’s lack of understanding and low levels of knowledge attributable to complex environmental problems, environmental jargon, scientific and technical processes. However, with the shift in environmental concern among stakeholders, stakeholders are making more informed environmental choices based on the information presented to them.

As customer publics start to identify the inconsistencies between a company’s actual behaviour in relation to the environmental claims they are making, “greenwashing” becomes more noticeable. Kanter in Gallicano (2011:4) points out that “this lack of connection between what companies are doing and how they are perceived threatens to weaken relationships between brands and consumers”.

It must be noted that sometimes “greenwashing” is not out of malice, but due to a lack of understanding in terms of environmental issues or a lack of verifiable proof to back up environmental claims. Poor, misguided or inappropriate communication can result in an industry leader being accused of “greenwashing”, even though their sustainability record might be better than their competitors (CIPR, 2007:3). As a result of false, misleading and exaggerated environmental claims, companies run the risk of irreparable brand damage, negative publicity, loss of stakeholder trust and investor confidence. It can also cause

confusion among consumers which can affect the consumer's ability to make informed choices which could lead to a decrease in a lack of participation in PEB.

In order to communicate effectively, mitigate "greenwashing" and to reduce marketplace confusion, environmental claims should be clear, specific, accurate, truthful, competent, reliable, backed up by verifiable evidence or a reputable third party. This allows consumers to be more aware of "greenwashing" and in turn provides them with the ability to make decisions to support those companies truly making a difference to reduce their environmental impact. However, many companies are not being transparent about their environmental impact and continue to "greenwash" customer publics with environmental messages and claims that are false, deceptive and misleading.

With "greenwashing" becoming more relevant in the coming years as a result of companies vying for a space in the green economy, regulating misleading environmental claims is important to mitigate "greenwashing". According to the CIPR (2007:4), no substantial legislation exists to protect the consumer against the unethical practice of "greenwashing". This is also the case in South Africa where there are no specific "greenwashing" provisions or standards or laws that protect the public against misleading environmental claims; however, legal protection does exist that protects consumers against unfair, deceptive and misleading marketing and advertising claims to which the same principle could apply.

## **2.2 Laws defining environmental claims**

With the uptake of environmental claims, it is important that organisations and their respective communication and marketing departments become aware of litigation in place to avoid penalties, fines and even imprisonment. Companies should familiarise themselves with the South African Consumer Protection Act (68 of 2008) (CPA) (herein referred to as CPA) (RSA, 2008c) in particular Section 40 and 41 that warns retailers against unfair marketing and business practices and against making misleading claims, as well as the Foodstuffs, Cosmetic and Disinfectant Act (54 of 1972) (RSA, 1972) that regulates misleading labelling and trade descriptions.

### **2.2.1 South African Consumer Protection Act (68 of 2008)**

According to environmental practice senior associate at Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr business law firm, Helen Dagut, the Consumer Protection Act (CPA) requires product labels or description of goods to be communicated in plain language and that the information be accurate and not misleading or deceptive (The Consumer Protection Act Protects the Environment Too, 2011).

The CPA (68 of 2008) (CPA) (RSA, 2008c) came into effect on 01 April 2011. The CPA regulates consumer transactions and agreements with regard to goods and services and was developed to give consumers better rights and improve standards of communication. The CPA prevents businesses from making unfair marketing claims, holds suppliers and companies accountable for what they promote and encourages responsible consumer behaviour (RSA, 2008c). There are a number of sections of the CPA that are applicable to protecting consumers against false or misleading environmental claims (How Does the New Consumer Protection Act Impact on You?, 2016). Three sections in particular could be relevant to navigating environmental claims, protecting the consumer against misleading environmental claims and ensuring that consumers are given accurate and honest information in order to make informed consumer decisions before supporting or purchasing a product that is perceived to be “environmentally friendly”. These include sections 22 and 24: the right to disclosure and information; Section 40: the right to fair and responsible marketing, and Section 41: the right to fair and honest dealing (RSA, 2008c).

Section 22(2)(b) states that consumers have the “right to information in plain and understandable language” where “plain language” is considered information that an ordinary consumer of the class of persons for whom the information is intended with average literacy skills and minimal experience as a consumer of the relevant goods or services being promoted could be expected to understand the content without undue effort (RSA, 2008c). Section 22 states that plain and understandable language applies to (a) the context, comprehensiveness and consistency of the information; (b) the organisation, form and style of the information; (c) the vocabulary, usage and sentence structure; as well as (d) the use of any illustrations, examples, headings or other aides to reading and understanding the information (RSA, 2008c).

The CPA (RSA, 2008c) states that consumers have a right to information in plain language that is clear and understandable. It is appreciated that not all people have the same level

of literacy or education. The importance of using “plain language” when communicating information relating to sustainability or the environment will become more relevant in chapters 3 and 4. Promoting messages in a clear and understandable way is important to environmental education and awareness. Being able to interpret sustainability and environmental information, especially environmental information or claims that are scientific or technical in nature, enables better understanding and helps consumers to be informed when making decisions whether to buy a product or support a company. If knowledge, education and literacy levels are low, it can become a barrier to shifting environmental attitudes and stakeholders engaging more frequently in PEB.

Section 24 pertains to “product labelling and trade descriptions” and prohibits trade descriptions and labels that are likely to mislead the consumer. This section further refers to the disclosure of specific and prescribed information that is required and will mitigate misleading the consumer (RSA, 2008c). As defined in the CPA, sections 24(1)(a) and (b), a trade description is a covering or label that is applied or attached to goods, it is also the commercial communication that is found in advertising, brochures and other communication material. It prohibits displaying a label “together or with, or in proximity to, the goods in a manner that is likely to lead to the belief that the goods are designated or described by that description” (RSA, 2008c). This section of the Act prohibits companies from knowingly altering or obscuring trade descriptions in a manner that misleads consumers. Retailers are warned not to display or supply any goods if they suspect in any way that the label description is likely to mislead consumers or that the label has been altered or changed in any way to mislead. It is the retailer’s responsibility to control and prevent other persons from misleading consumers (RSA, 2008c).

To mitigate misleading the public, sections 24 (5)(a and b) and (6) of the Act further refers to specific information that needs to be disclosed on all labelling, including the country of origin, prescribed information as outlined in the Act, as well as whether the goods contain genetically modified organisms (GMOs) (RSA, 2008c). This section of the CPA runs parallel to sections 34 and 48 of the Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants Act (54 of 1972) (RSA, 1972) that regulates the labelling and advertising of foods. This will be discussed in more detail in Section 2.2.2 of the study. Consumer awareness of labelling is still in its infancy and more information needs to be provided to aid the consumer in understanding what is considered “misleading” and what is not, especially in terms of environmental claims.

Section 29 (a and b) deals with general standards for marketing goods or services. It warns retailers not to market goods or services in a manner that is “reasonably likely to imply a false or misleading representation” or in a manner that is “misleading, fraudulent or deceptive in any way”. This includes the nature, properties and price of the goods or services they are promoting (RSA, 2008c).

Sections 40 and 41 are particularly important as these cover unconscionable conduct and false, misleading or deceptive representation, which is paramount to communicating information that can promote understanding, educate and shift PEB and attitudes (RSA, 2008c). Section 40 addresses “unconscionable conduct” in terms of 40(2) where it is “unconscionable for a supplier [to] knowingly take advantage of the fact that a consumer was substantially unable to protect the consumer’s own interests because of physical or mental disability, illiteracy, ignorance, inability to understand the language of an agreement or any other similar factor”. This ensures that consumers are protected against a supplier taking advantage of the fact that they are not fully informed, or may be illiterate or not understand the language of the agreement. This ignorance or lack of understanding can be applied in terms of environmental claims that are perhaps more technical or scientific in nature and not easily understood as highlighted in Section 22 of the CPA (RSA, 2008c). Many consumers may not be aware of the implications of purchasing a product that may claim to have environmental attributes when in fact it may not contribute to the consumers and environmental overall well-being. The reason for this could be a lack of understanding and a low-level of awareness of environmental issues among varying “levels” of education which has been identified as a research problem. This issue will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Section 41 of the CPA (RSA, 2008c) warns suppliers not to use words or actions that will directly or indirectly mislead or deceive consumers by means of ambiguity, innuendo or exaggeration of a material fact. Omission of a material fact could be seen as deceptive as it does not present the consumer with a total mix of information in which to make an informed decision. The Act is clear that companies will not make false, misleading or deceptive claims or misrepresent their goods including ingredients, performance characteristics, standards, quality and pricing (RSA, 2008c).

According to the blog article that appeared on Green Worx CS Blog (Coetzee, 2016), although no legislation currently exists to protect the consumer against misleading environmental claims, the CPA should be able to provide ample provision for consumers or concerned bodies to lodge a complaint and take action against organisations that



“greenwash”. Consumers now have more power than before. If consumers feel that they have possibly been misled or not given sufficient information to make an informed decision, they can approach a consumer tribunal or a consumer court of the province with jurisdiction over the matter to lodge a complaint. If this complaint is found to be true, the CPA is authorised to issue an order, forcing the organisation to remove the product or service, or to correct the advert, packaging or representation. The CPA is also authorised to impose penalties and fines on suppliers and distributors of up to R1 million if they are in breach of this Act in any way (RSA, 2008c).

If that fails, the consumer can approach an alternate dispute resolution agent to resolve any transaction dispute between the consumer and supplier. If during this period the dispute resolution agent cannot find any possible resolution to the matter, then the aggrieved party may approach or refer the matter to a high court or magistrate. If the organisation is found to be in breach of the Act, they could find themselves facing a prison sentence of up to ten years (How Does the New Consumer Protection Act Impact on You?, 2016).

This means that organisations have further obligations in respect of their goods or services to ensure that they minimise risk to consumers and/or the environment, over and above other environmental protection responsibilities prescribed under environmental law. This protects the consumer and empowers them to put into force the CPA when suppliers do not fulfil their obligation (The Consumer Protection Act Protects the Environment Too, 2011). Due to the low levels of understanding of complex environmental process, issues and claims among customer-publics in South Africa, the researcher feels that more education around these issues need to take place before customer-publics or organisation can take legal action.

### **2.2.2 Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants Act (54 of 1972)**

Labelling is a form of communication. It provides information and creates awareness about the product and can tell a story of the product's origin. Many organisations today are increasingly adding words and images that promote the environmental attributes of their product in order to vie for the attention of the environmentally and health conscious consumer (Van Zyl, 2004:5-9).



These days, phrases such as “natural”, “organic”, “healthy” and “free-range” can be found on labels and packaging in the promotion cosmetics and, increasingly, foodstuffs. At face value, consumers trust these brands; however, words, logos or images appearing on labels can be misleading and can often lead consumers down a “path of deception” where they believe a product to be “good”, “safe” or “environmentally sound” when in fact it is not. Companies may fraudulently misrepresent their products or services as being environmentally sound, whilst in reality these are no different from another company in the same category. This can be seen as unfair competition (Van Zyl, 2004:8-9). With an increase of consumer awareness and the need for transparency, organisations should be aware of the financial and reputational implications that could arise from promoting false and misleading information.

According to De Villiers (2009:11-13), there are regulations in place to protect the South African consumer in terms of the production, labelling and marketing of food. One such law is the Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants Act (54 of 1972) (RSA, 1972), which regulates the labelling and advertising of foods in South Africa. It is by law that all South African food products be up to standard in terms of current food labelling and advertising legislation and that stipulated mandatory information be included on these labels (De Villiers, 2009:12-13). In addition to mandatory information being included, the Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants Act (1972) also pays specific attention to the wording of labels and how products are advertised.

Owing to certain South African food manufacturers who in the past have misled the consumer with deceptive marketing claims printed on labels, the Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants Act (54 of 1972) (RSA, 1972) helps to prevent misleading and inaccurate claims from being made. In Section 34(1) of the Act (RSA, 1972), it is made clear that the pictorial content on the label or advertisement on packaging may not be false, misleading or deceptive in any way, this includes creating the impression that the contents are likely to create the desired effects as stated on the packaging. In terms of environmental claims, it would seem that the product information is usually secondary to the pictorial content on packaging and labelling by means of suggestive “green” imagery, such as trees, open outdoors and endangered species, including self-endorsed logos alluding that the product is less harmful to the environment than any other products within the same category in terms of its environmental commitment.

Further to warning organisations to steer clear of pictorial misrepresentation, Section 48 of the Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants Act (54 of 1972) (RSA, 1972) also warns

organisations to avoid misleading descriptions and images which could be construed as ambiguous or create a false impression that the product or service is more than what it is. Having the verifiable evidence to back up these claims on labelling is important to show that the organisation is truthful, reputable and accountable to a third party. De Villiers (2009:14) is in agreement and further adds that certain provisions should be met and claims need to be backed by verifiable evidence or endorsed by a South African National Accreditation System of good standing and product endorsements should be from a professional and reputable programme. No company should endorse its own products as this might also be seen as unfair competition and could lead to confusion in the marketplace.

Endorsement of products is seen mostly in eco-labels, which are trademarks awarded to products that are deemed less harmful to the environment than other products which falls in the same class. Eco-labels are supposed to be endorsed and verified by an accredited and reputable third-party, like the European Union who award eco-labels based on certain environmental standards or criteria, verifiable evidence being one of them. The benefits of reputable and recognised eco-labels is that these educate the consumer, raise awareness of environmental effects of products, and encourage other companies to develop innovative ways to make products less harmful to the environment. Consumers learn that they can trust the validity of the claim and that the product does what it says it does (Van Zyl, 2004:6-8).

Aiding companies in their quest to compete for a space in the “green economy”, marketers and communicators use eco-labels as a tool to further the marketing and promotion of the environmental attributes of a product to entice consumer choice and purchasing behaviour. Some company’s marketers will conceptualise, adopt or change text or pictorial content on the brand labels in order to promote their environmental claims (Kitchen, 2015). As a result, there has been an increase where companies, by means of an eco-label, such as “Earth Smart” or “Earth-Friendly” will self-endorse their product or service as being “environmentally sound” when in fact they are not. This can be construed as “greenwashing”. Instead of building trust, these claims and logos build suspicion, leave the consumer feeling confused, and in the end does nothing to change behaviour and reduce environmental impact (Van Zyl, 2004:9).

Van Zyl (2004:9) highlights that South Africa does not currently have an accredited eco-label of its own, nor does it have a legal framework that regulates eco-labelling. Regardless of South Africa’s lack of statutory structure relating to eco-labelling and

environmental claims, South Africa does have at its disposal the Constitution (RSA, 1996) and the NEMA (RSA, 1998a) both of which strive for the development and protection of people and the environment and in so doing, fostering the definition of sustainable development (Van Zyl, 2004:2 & 27). As South Africa currently does not have an eco-label of its own, there are self-regulated industry bodies that have been established to help regulate industry standards and to guide companies when it comes to eco-labels and environmental claims. In the following subsection, the study assesses the 70 year old International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) that has been globally adopted in over 114 countries and South Africa's Advertising Standards Authority (SASA) that regulates advertising standards in South Africa.

### **2.3 Self-Regulated standards governing environmental claims**

Organisations and manufacturers sensing increased "green" business will be more encouraged to mark their products accordingly and promote the environmental attributes and claims to get the attention and trust of their consumers, reassuring them that their products cause less stress on the environment (Dee *et al.*, 2012:5). This increase of environmental labelling can cause "greenwashing", which is a mark of concern as scientifically inaccurate labelling or representation can cause consumer confusion which indirectly affects their purchasing decisions and behaviour (Dee *et al.*, 2012:7). Mitigating this confusion by providing accurate information helps consumers to be better informed and more confident in making informed purchasing decisions based on the information provided. This can directly improve the environmental performance of a company.

As currently no laws for environmental claims exist, companies are guided by leading industry standards and principles established by self-regulated industry bodies when making environmental claims. The UK-based Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) highlights that using leading industry standards and methodology is a good starting point when making environmental claims, especially when making claims that involve statistics, such as emissions, waste improvements, and reduction claims (CIPR, 2007:5). Both the International Organisation of Standardization (ISO) and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) have applications and bodies represented in South Africa.

South Africa has responded to the trend of environmental responsibility with the adoption of the ISO 14000 series of international standards, which require audits and provide external verification of compliance. Quantitative indicators are being developed to improve

evaluation of compliance. Companies that abide by these certifications can provide reliable and credible data about their environmental activities, services and products as it is checked and endorsed by an independent third party (CIPR, 2007:5).

### **2.3.1 International Organisation for Standardization (ISO)**

The International Organisation for Standardization (ISO) is a global organisation that provides guidance in terms of manufacturing standards. It was established in 1946 in Geneva, Switzerland (ISO, 2019). It has a series of guiding principles but for the purpose of this study the ISO 14000 series will be examined.

The ISO 14000 is an acceptable tool when it comes to environmental management standards. Within the ISO 14000 series there are two sections that are applicable to regulations governing environmental claims; namely, the ISO 14020 that deals specifically with environmental claims, labels and declarations (Dee *et al.*, 2012:7) and is “strongly recommended to check for guidance when making environmental claims about a product” (CIPR, 2007,5) and the ISO 14063 that provides a list of environmental communication guidelines and examples that assist organisations in communicating and explaining the environmental impact their company, product or service has on the environment to both internal and external target audiences. Understanding the need for guidance in terms of environmental claims, the ISO 14020 series of standards provides valuable information for organisations when communicating their environmental standards, claims or ethos.

According to Dee *et al.* (2012:9-24), the ISO 14020 series can be further divided into three subsections, namely ISO 14021 (1999) (self-declared environmental claims such as degradable, recyclable, recycled content, reduced water/energy consumption and newer claims including renewable material, renewable energy, sustainable, carbon footprint and “carbon neutral”, “food miles”), ISO 14024 (1999) (eco-labelling schemes) and ISO 14025 (2006) (lifecycle declarations).

According to the UK’s Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) (2011), the ISO 14021 self-declared environmental claims are used in numerous countries as a starting point to inform national codes and guidance. Dee *et al.* (2012:9-10) also highlight that the ISO 14021 is a critical business tool for manufacturers and businesses that make environmental claims in their advertisements. The overall goal of labelling is to communicate verifiable and accurate information that is not misleading, to create a demand for environmental products or services without damaging the environment, made

in a way that is meaningful and beneficial to the consumer but at the same time stimulate market growth.

As highlighted in Section 48 of the Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants Act (54 of 1972) (RSA, 1972), having the verifiable evidence to back up your claims not only shows that an organisation is truthful, reputable and accountable, there is also a reduction in marketplace confusion, increased opportunity for consumers to make more informed choices and the prevention or minimisation of unwarranted claims.

The ISO 14021 requires that all claims be verified and that this information be made available to any person that requests information. When evaluating the verification of claims, it is the responsibility of the person making the claim to ensure that it is accurate and that they have the necessary information to verify it (the documentary evidence). This information must be accessible on request to any person. This evaluation is important especially when it comes to comparative claims. The methods used need to be identified, as well as the details of the independent third party who evaluated the claim. If confidentiality is an issue, then the claim should not be made (Dee *et al.*, 2012:10-11).

According to Dee *et al.* (2012:11-12), all self-declared environmental claims shall be: 1) accurate and not misleading; 2) substantiated and verified; 3) unlikely to result in misinterpretation; and 4) not vague or non-specific claims, i.e. “environmentally friendly”, “green”, “nature’s friend”. The same rule applies to text and symbols (pictures, symbols or logos), which are all used to convey a message about the environmental attributes of a product and lends to the same ambiguity as with text claims.

ISO 14024 refers to eco-labelling, which is another form of environmental marketing that companies use to differentiate their products and could fall into the same category when it comes to communicating environmental claims by means of advertising and public relations. The ISO 14024 is an example of a reputable third party standard that has established the certification procedures for awarding the label. It is important to take the whole product life cycle from cradle to grave into consideration. Eco-labels need to be verified and transparency is important in terms of the information being made available to interested parties where appropriate (Dee *et al.*, 2012:15-18).

The last category of the ISO 14020 series is ISO 14025(2006) (ISO, 2012), which refers to the lifecycle declarations that have become of growing importance in business-to-business commerce. This type of environmental declaration is important to businesses in terms of performance of a product to enable objective comparisons between products fulfilling the

same function. This also “assists purchasers in green procurement where they need to make informed comparisons between separate products” (Dee *et al.*, 2012:22). Having an independent third-party verification gives credibility to the claim. It must be noted, “behind any simple environmental claim, there is a complex world of science-based assumptions and facts. It is, therefore, of vital importance that any concept for carbon footprint information introduced in the market be indisputable and correct from the very beginning” (Dee *et al.*, 2012:24).

The ISO 14001 highlights communication requirements that organisations are required to establish, implement and maintain. This includes both internal and external communication procedures that allow a two-way flow of information. The ISO 14063 (ISO, 2006) forms part of the ISO 14000 series of environmental standards. It guides organisations in terms of general principles when communicating and explaining the use of environmental claims and the environmental impact their company, product or service has on the environment to both internal and external target audiences (ISO, 2006 & CIPR, 2007:5). These guidelines are applicable to all organisations, regardless of size, and are not intended for certification purposes.

In terms of environmental claims, ISO 14063 stresses the importance of transparency, clarity and credibility. As indicated in the 14020 series, verifiable, accurate information should be made available to all persons. The same applies to 14063, where information should be made available to interested parties, the information should be relevant, easily understandable and where communication is conducted “in an honest and fair manner, and [where information is provided] that is truthful, accurate and substantive and not misleading to interested parties” (ISO 2006:2).

The ISO 14063 provides valuable guidelines on how to engage with and respond to stakeholders and participants so that organisations are able to glean knowledge, understand the environmental needs and concerns of interested parties, foster trust and dialogue, enhance the perception and reputation of a company and be able to understand the communication pattern including the topics communicated, the channels used to communicate the environmental messages, the intended target audience as well as the environmental [attitudes and] behaviour of interested parties in order to successfully communicate and promote organisations’ environmental credentials, achievements and performance (ISO, 2006).

### 2.3.2 Advertising standards relating to environmental claims

The Advertising Regulatory Board (ARB) is an independent body set up and paid for by the marketing and communication industry that self-regulates advertising in the interest of the public. Section G of the ARB provides guidelines for advertising containing environmental claims, which is defined as “any direct or indirect claim, representation, reference or indication in an advertisement relating to the immediate or future impact or influence on the environment of a product or its packaging or a service” (ARB, 2019).

This section of the ARB has come about owing to the increased number of environmental claims used extensively in advertising that mislead consumers regarding a company's environmental practices or the environmental benefits of a product or service (Green Business Guide, 2010). Codes of practice are in place to provide and regulate complaints concerning deceptive and misleading adverts and to reduce confusion, which often exists owing to a lack of basic understanding of environmental claims (CIPR, 2007:5; Environmental Claims in Advertising, 2009).

If an advert is deemed misleading or deceptive in any way, competitors or the public may lodge a complaint with the ARB. If the company is found to be in breach of the advertising code, the ARB has the authority to remove an advertisement (Green Business Guide, 2010; How Does the New Consumer Protection Act Impact on You? 2016). Although the ARB does not have the legal power to impose fines against organisations that breach the code, it does have the status of delegated legislation as it has been acknowledged by the Electronic Communications Act (36 of 2005) (RSA, 2005) as the accepted standard with which all broadcasters in South Africa are required to familiarise themselves and ensure that their adverts conform accordingly (Van Zyl, 2004:45).

If their request is ignored, the ARB has the right to send out an “ad-alert” to all members informing them of this advert, which can result in the media houses that abide by the ARB code of conduct not publishing or using it. If an advertiser is found to be in breach and the advert still has not been withdrawn, this could bring the advertiser in conflict with Section 48 of the Consumer Protection Act (68 of 2008) (RSA, 2008c) where a complaint can be lodged and a company taken to a court of law if they are found to be in breach of misleading, deceptive and false claims or pictorial content.

The ARB code focuses on reducing marketplace confusion as to the origin of the goods, as well as complaints involving alleged misrepresentations or advertising claims that cannot be substantiated (Van Zyl, 2004). The ARB codes (2019) warns advertisers against



making unqualified claims and statements or descriptions about environmental matters such as “free-of” or “... free” that cannot be 100 percent substantiated or alludes to the fact that the stated substance is absent. In addition, this applies to claims of degradability of packaging material, which are all subject to substantiation. When making environmental claims, the Advertising Standards Code specifies that a company may only refer to a specific product or action and may not imply that it extends to the company’s performance as a whole. All environmental claims should clearly indicate if it refers to the packaging or the product to avoid misleading the consumer into thinking it refers to both.

More specifically, the ARB codes cautions advertisers not to make general environmental claims such as “environmentally friendly”, “ozone friendly” and “green”, unless they are qualified by a description of benefit conferred. This also applies to pictorial content, signs, symbols and self-regulated logos, which should provide the source of the information and should not suggest that it has been officially endorsed.

The ARB states that all environmental claims and statements made in advertising must not be vague, incomplete, irrelevant, ambiguous or misleading in any way and that all claims need to be able to be substantiated or verified by scientific standards and be beneficial to the consumer (ARB, 2019; How Does the New Consumer Protection Act Impact on You?, 2016).

In comparison to other international advertising standards relating to environmental claims, South Africa’s ARB seems to fall behind. An example of this would be the fact that the ARB specifically references companies not making claims that their product is “ozone friendly” if at any time of the manufacturing or packaging process, chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) are emitted. Interestingly enough, the ARB seems to be the only advertising standard that still refers to CFCs when compared to international advertising standards. The ARB code has not indicated that CFCs were banned in 1992 under the 1987 Montreal Protocol to protect the ozone layer, or that HCFCs, an upgrade from the CFC ban, will be limited, if not completely banned, by 2030.

For the purposes of comparison, the researcher assessed other international advertising standards authorities that govern the use of environmental claims, including the New Zealand Advertising Standards Authority (ASA, 2018), the Canadian Code of Advertising Standards (ASC, 2016), the Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland (ASAI, 2015) and the UK Advertising Standards Authority (ASA, 2013).



The use of general claims, such as “environmentally friendly”, “eco-friendly”, “green” and “not harmful to the environment” should not be used if it cannot be qualified and should be based on the complete lifecycle of the product (ASA, 2013; ASA (NZ), 2018; ASC, 2016). The use of absolute claims, including “100 percent recycled” or “wholly sustainable” or “100 percent ecologically sound” and less absolute claims such as “environmentally friendlier” or “environmentally kinder” cannot be used unless the claim can be verified with robust evidence or can demonstrate improvement or a significant advantage over competitors (ASA, 2013; ASA (NZ), 2018; ASAI, 2015).

All environmental claims should be verified by scientific-based evidence, backed up by substantiated evidence (ASC, 2016; ASA (NZ), 2018; ASAI, 2015) or meet relevant standards according to local or international standards where presenting claims, such as biodegradable, compostable and organic (ASA, 2013; ASA (NZ), 2018). Ireland ASA warns that if there is a significant division of scientific opinion or where evidence is inconclusive then those environmental claims should be avoided (ASAI, 2015).

When making environmental claims, advertisers should not single out one environmental attribute when all other characteristics of a product or service may be harmful to the environment (ASC, 2016). Advertisers should not claim or imply that their product does not damage the environment or claim that the product is safe based on the absence of a harmful chemical when other products in the same category do not include the chemical or cause the effect (ASA, 2013; ASA (NZ), 2018; ASAI, 2015). This implies that the whole product is environmentally safe when it is not and is misleading to the consumer.

To avoid misleading consumers, all claims should be presented clearly, accurately and in plain language that can be easily understood (ASA, 2013; ASA (NZ), 2018; ASC, 2016; ASAI, 2015). Claims should also not be vague, or omit information that could be relevant and assist a consumer in making an informed decision (ASA, 2013; ASC, 2016). If scientific terminology is used, it should be ensured that it is relevant, shows a genuine benefit, useful and can be easily understood (ASA, 2013; ASA (NZ), 2018). Companies should also minimise confusion among consumers by ensuring that claims are truthful, fair, accurate and can be substantiated (ASC, 2016). Advertisers should avoid over-exaggeration when making the claim and avoid using any symbols, words or images that falsely imply that the product has received official approval or endorsed by a third party (ASAI, 2015; ASA (NZ), 2018; ASAI, 2015).

## **2.4 International Green Guides Governing Environmental Claims**

The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) are government agencies for the UK and USA respectively. They have been established to regulate green marketing claims, ensuring consumers are protected from false or misleading claims and thereby enabling them to make an informed decision to evaluate a firm's environmental claims (Polonsky, 1994). They replace the advertising standards authorities in other countries. The green guides are not legally binding; however, they are directly responsible to other acts within their respective governments. Although not applicable to South African legislation, the principles suggested in these guides could be included in addition to the environmental claims highlighted in Section G of the ARB.

### **2.4.1 Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)**

The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is the UK government department responsible for safeguarding the UK's natural environment ensuring and supporting the food and farming industry in order to sustain a thriving rural economy (UK Government Department, 2017). DEFRA's policies specify that before any products can make an environmental claim, all consumer products need to go through a fairness test. This protects consumers from unfair, misleading or aggressive selling practices (DEFRA, 2011:5).

DEFRA compiled a Green Claims Practical Guidance (DEFRA, 2011) to reduce unjust competition by minimising unfair or misleading claims and to improve the standard of environmental claims being made. This guide represents good business practice to be followed on a voluntary basis and is not regulated or enforced by the government. It promotes the use of clear, accurate and relevant environmental claims in marketing and advertising. It can strengthen a company's reputation and credibility with consumers and investors and enhance the appeal of its products. The claim guide also "sets out principles to inform the decision-making process when developing, checking or supporting robust environmental claims" (DEFRA, 2011:3-4, 6).

Although the DEFRA Green Guides are not legally binding, companies in breach of the code can be taken to task by the legally binding Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008. DEFRA Green Guides is also aligned to a number of self-regulated standards in the UK, namely the International Standards Organisation (ISO) 14021 on self-

declared environmental claims, which is used widely in many countries as a basis to inform national codes and guidance, the UK non-broadcast (CAP Code) and Code of Broadcast Advertising (BCAP), as well as the European Commission Guidance for Making and Assessing Environmental Claims and EU Unfair Commercial Practices Directives. The Advertising Standards Authority as a self-regulatory organisation monitors and evaluates adverts to ensure that they are fair, truthful and not misleading in line with CAP and BCAP (DEFRA, 2011:4-5).

False, misleading, unclear or confusing claims have the potential to weaken consumer confidence when it comes to promoting “green” initiatives. It can also cause unfair competition between those companies vying for the same target market and discourage companies from making truthful claims. Environmental claims that convey the environmental attributes of products accurately, show a genuine benefit to the environment and provide clear and robust environmental claims which can help to reduce confusion, improve the effectiveness and credibility of claims and help consumers to make informed choices (DEFRA, 2011:3,7).

DEFRA stipulates three key guidelines in the Green Claims Practical Guidance (DEFRA, 2011) that assist companies and their advertising agencies to communicate the environmental attributes of their products accurately and honestly. Firstly, the marketer should ensure that the content is relevant and reflects a genuine benefit for consumers. It should also be indicative of the entire lifecycle analysis and showcasing the full environmental impact across the whole business. The claim should not imply a wider overall benefit for the product (DEFRA, 2011:13-14).

Secondly, environmental claims should be presented in a way that is clear, accurate and free of ambiguity. General environmental phrases that are seemingly vague such as “green” or “environmentally friendly” should be avoided. Even if the claim is literally and technically true, it is still capable of being misunderstood or misinterpreted. Taking heed of the claim’s overall impression ensure that it is not misleading. This will reduce marketplace confusion and help consumers to understand the intended meaning. Avoid misleading imagery that could imply a sweeping environmental benefit or a logo that suggests it has been endorsed by a third party when this is not the case.

Thirdly, to mitigate “greenwashing”, ensures that supporting documents and information can be verified and substantiated. Companies need to be sure that the environmental claim they are making is authentic and accurate and has robust and/or scientific evidence

and supporting documents to back up the claim if it is ever challenged. Make sure that the supporting document or information is available to consumers who are looking for additional information. If the information is not accessible or a company is not allowed to disclose the information owing to confidentiality, then DEFRA is clear that the company should consider not promoting the claim at all (DEFRA, 2011:17, 20-23, 25, 28-19).

#### **2.4.2 USA Federal Trade Commission (FTC) “Green Guide”**

The FTC is the governmental agency in charge of protecting consumers against fraud, deception and unfair business practices. The Federal Trade Commission Environmental Marketing Guide is not binding on the Commission and is the staff's view of the law's requirements. The guides indicate how the Commission will apply Section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act (2006), which prohibits unfair or misleading acts or practices, to environmental marketing claims (FTC, 2012b). The guide explains how consumers are likely to interpret environmental marketing claims so that marketers can avoid making false or misleading claims (FTC, 2012a).

The FTC Guide highlights a number of specific environmental claims that advertisers and marketers should take heed of when making claims about a company product or packing. Environmental claims should reflect a genuine benefit and claims should be easily interpreted, clear and accurate. All claims should avoid overstating or exaggerating the environmental benefits or attributes of a product. To avoid misinterpretation of the claim, advertisers should ensure that the environmental claim should be specific as to whether it refers to the product or the packaging or if it is simply a component of either. Specific claims are less likely to be misleading and easier to substantiate in comparison to an unqualified general claim that may imply the product has far-reaching environmental benefits when it doesn't.

When promoting environmental claims, the FTC Guide (FTC, 2012b) is very clear that all claims should be substantiated, especially those that may require scientific substantiation, such as “degradable”, “biodegradable”, “photodegradable” and “compostable”. The FTC warns against making misleading environmental claims that cannot be substantiated including claims that imply that a product is “free-of” has lowered or reduced the weight, volume, or its ingredients, product or packaging are not harmful to the environment (FTC, 2012b).

The FTC guide principles are all very similar to the principles the researcher presented with regard to the DEFRA green guides and advertising standards authorities. The FTC guide, according to research, is the only publication to date that has been revised to keep up with newer environmental claims including “carbon offsets” and “renewable energy” claims, which both, owing to the complexity of each claim, require competent and reliable scientific and accounting methods to be properly quantified (FTC, 2012a).

## Chapter 3: Understanding Pro-Environmental Behaviour

### 3.1 Introduction

The earth is faced with major environmental challenges, including climate change, pollution, water scarcity, loss of biodiversity and the depletion of valuable natural resources. Increased awareness of these issues as well as the consequences for both the environment and the impacts it will have on the health and well-being of humans and wildlife that inhabit the earth has intensified concern.

In response to increased environmental concern, individuals have become mindful of the individual choices that they make when it comes to environmental and ethical decisions and have been prompted to rethink their support for a company or product if not properly informed about its environmental benefits. The public has also been influenced by an active perception of their environmental rights to a clean and healthy environment and the threat from environmental problems (Barr and Gilg, 2007:374). This concern has highlighted the need for PEB to mitigate environmental risks which is high on the global and local agenda.

### 3.2 Pro-Environmental Behaviour (PEB)

PEB, also referred to as environmentally friendly behaviour, stewardship behaviour, conservation behaviour, consumer environmental behaviour and environmental-related behaviour (ERB), can be defined as individual behaviour and actions taken in relation to concern for the environment that contribute to environmental sustainability.

Another description of PEB relates to the conduct of someone who displays a number of pro-environmental actions across many domains, such as reducing energy usage, waste minimisation and recycling, water conservation, transportation and shows a high level of support for environmental issues (Markowitz *et al.*, 2012:82; Ones & Dilchert, 2012:452).

PEB is also displayed in purchasing behaviour, as many consumers have become conscious of the need to support and buy environmentally responsible products in order to protect the planet. However, PEB goes beyond simply purchasing products and household habits, like recycling. It takes into account other factors including specific behaviour, lifestyles and socio-demographic characteristics (such as age or gender), as well as existing environmental attitudes, beliefs, social and environmental values of individuals,

including external influences and barriers to environmental behaviour (such as cost and comfort) (Markowitz *et al.*, 2012:82-84; Barr *et al.*, 2005:1425-1444). It is often assumed that individuals who pursue PEB activities will probably hold positive attitudes, be more knowledgeable on environmental issues, feel connected to nature, demonstrate environmental concern and understand the consequences of their actions if they do not take action (Dunlap *et al.*, 2000:426-427; Mobley *et al.*, 2010:420; Markowitz *et al.*, 2012:83). In addition, researchers and policy-makers have reason to believe that the higher the PEB of individuals, the more they will contribute to decreasing environmental issues (Mobley *et al.*, 2010:421).

According to Dietz (cited in Klöckner, 2013:1028), the behaviour of individuals has the potential to either significantly contribute to global environmental challenges or to significantly reduce the impact of these challenges. The level to which environmental impact can be reduced by changes in individual behaviour depends on the impact of the behaviour, the number of people performing the behaviour and the plasticity of people willing or able to change the behaviour. There is currently a disconnect between the level of concern about environmental issues and the intent to engage in changing environmental behaviour. The inconsistency between an organisation's actual behaviour and their environmental claims has potential to taint confidence, cause distrust among publics and the organisation which could lead to a negative perception of the company or brand. This negative perception, lack of confidence and distrust can lead to a decrease in environmental concern and a lack of PEB.

Considering the urgency of the ecological crisis facing people and the part human decisions plays in bringing about or containing environmental issues, Markowitz *et al.* (2012:82) believes it is imperative that the etiology of PEB be explored from a theoretical and methodological perspective. Bronfman *et al.* (2015:14135) are in agreement that, with the increase of environmental issues, more focus is needed on establishing environmentally responsible societies and understanding why individuals perform PEB, especially in terms of policy-making and solutions to environmental problems that require behavioural change.

For many years, researchers, scholars, policy-makers, environmental psychologists and sociologists have tried to understand the pro-environmental individual in order to explain and predict environmental behaviour (Markowitz *et al.*, 2012:82; Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7685; Mobley *et al.*, 2010:421). According to Klöckner (2013:1028), in order to identify the determinants of human environmental behaviour pivotal to changing people's

behaviour, an understanding of their actions and decisions when making an environmental decision needs to be explored.

In an attempt to understand pro-environmental individuals, researchers have explored the antecedents of environmental behaviour including the cognitive characteristics of individuals, such as existing environmental attitudes, beliefs, values, social norms and behavioural intentions (Ones & Dilchert, 2012:455;), as well as the socio-demographic and situational characteristics that influence the increase or decrease of PEB towards the environment. Research shows that these determinants are an underlying motivator for PEB and antecedents of consumer environmental behaviour (Markowitz *et al.*, 2012:82; Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7685).

These components are discussed briefly below in order to gain a better understanding of the cognitive and situational factors that influence environmental behaviour and play a role in the increase or decrease of environmental quality.

### **3.3 Cognitive factors Influencing PEB**

With the increase of environmental concerns, researchers are asking if current environmental behaviour stems from individual environmental attitudes, values, beliefs and social norms.

#### **3.3.1 Environmental attitudes**

Eagly and Chaiken (cited in Best & Mayerl, 2013:695) define attitudes as the evaluation or expression, positive or negative (likes and dislikes, passions and hate, attractions and repulsions), of people, objects or ideas. According to Gifford and Sussman (2012), a person's behaviour is influenced by attitudes that are traditionally comprised of cognitive, affective and behavioural components where the cognitive component is primarily based on beliefs, affective is based more on people's feelings or values, and behavioural is based on intention or behaviour towards an object. Attitudes are often confused with values and beliefs, though they do differ slightly.

Environmental attitudes can be defined as an individual's concern for the physical environment or about environmental issues (Gifford & Sussman, 2012:1), whereas PEB can be defined as the *actions* taken in relation to concern for the environment, as



described in Section 3.2. As research unfolds general environmental attitudes are influenced by an individual's values, beliefs and social norms toward an object – in this case the environment – which in turn determine specific attitudes and often, but not always, play a role in the increase or decrease of environmental quality (Heberlein n.d, 241; Gifford & Sussman, 2012:1).

According to Cox (2010:20;23) human modes of communication can mediate or influence a person's environmental beliefs, attitudes and behaviour therefore playing a major role in a company's environmental strategy. In order to minimise confusion and maximise consumer confidence in green marketing to encourage PEB, public relations practitioners and communication professionals are tasked with ensuring that information is readily and easily accessible, that communication is clear, understandable and accurate and that continuous dialogue takes place to help understand the needs and concerns of publics.

### 3.3.2 Values

According to Schwartz (cited in Bagchi *et al.*, 2015:77-78), values guide the reactions and actions of individuals when seeing the world, society and the people within it. Values, according to Bagchi *et al.* (2015:77-78), is a way that individuals' measure people and events, and a way to explain an individual's actions and reasoning. Values can be seen as a reflection of what is considered to be good, proper and acceptable in society (Bagchi *et al.*, 2015:77-78). Values influence decision-making, moral judgements, responses to others and influence goals and motivate people to *action*. Thus, an individual's behaviour is guided by values.

Values can be defined as both personal and cultural. According to Smith (cited in Bagchi *et al.*, 2015:77), cultural values are an aggregate of individual values, as individuals cannot have a culture of their own. Schwartz defines cultural values as the differentiation of variables within groups or societies compared to the differing variables that an individual holds. Schwartz further explains that values are different for each individual as they are made up of independent variables including different personal experiences, social locations, backgrounds, culture and social upbringing (Bagchi *et al.*, 2015:78). Values vary in importance and individual priority. The importance of these values or priorities guides the *actions* of the individual (Bagchi *et al.*, 2015:78).

Values differ from attitudes in that they are not easily changed and can influence behaviour through attitudes. According to a conceptual framework for understanding and analysing attitudes towards environmental behaviour previously developed by Stewart Barr in 2001, values and behaviour are linked but are mediated by a range of situational and psychological factors that intervene to both formulate intentions and influence the relationship between intentions and behaviour (Barr & Gilg, 2007:363). Research on basic human values show that individuals who support values of self-transcendence or express altruism, where understanding, appreciation and protection of people and nature are evident, are more likely to exhibit PEB (Markowitz *et al.*, 2012:84).

### 3.3.3 Social norms

Where values have been defined as general guidelines of what is important and worthwhile, norms are specific guidelines and expectations for actual behaviour that stipulate how people should and should not behave in various social situations. Sometimes, the values and norms of a society conflict with each other.

Social norms play a part in influencing individual values and can affect the intention to engage in PEB. People feel the need to belong and will more likely engage in behaviour that are seen as socially acceptable, or the norm within a group. When in a social environment, presenting a positive image of yourself is seen as important as it encourages people to conform to a group (Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7686). Sadalla and Krull, in Barr and Gilg (2007:365), believe the role of society, friends and family can formulate and encourage environmental behaviour, especially those actions and activities that are highly visible to other people like consumption, which Ozaki (cited in Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7686) believes can be representative of their social and personal values and persona.

Ozaki also believes that “strong social norms are required to encourage adoption of various PEB”. The literature suggests that friends, family, associates, as well as societal and cultural values most often influence these norms (Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7686). This can influence individual environmental behaviour towards home-based behaviour, such as recycling, energy saving and purchasing behaviour. The intention to adopt environmental behaviour can have a positive effect as a result of personal norms (Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7685; Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14146).

Ozaki (cited in Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7685) strongly believes that as consumers become conscious of an environmental issue and believe it will happen, normative action takes place and as more consumers take up innovative actions, that *action becomes a norm*, which in turn encourages other people to adopt the practice. It is this pro-environmental normative behaviour and demonstration effect that is needed to make a difference to the environmental footprint. It is this thinking that has partly formulated the research hypothesis of the study as indicated in section 1.4.3.

### 3.3.4 Beliefs

Beliefs are expressions of values. They are the feeling of certainty that something exists or is true. Research shows a mixed reaction to the theory that beliefs can influence environmental behaviour. Some researchers believe that individuals with stronger pro-environmental beliefs are more likely to engage in environmental-oriented behaviour (Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7685), while authors of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) framework, Ajzen and Fishbein (cited in Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7685), claim that just because individuals are concerned about the environment or are intent on making a change does not mean that it will relate into PEB.

There are also researchers like Tanner and Kast (cited in Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7686) that believe that “consumers have a feeling of responsibility when they understand what is occurring and the consequences of their actions. A feeling of moral obligation is a considerable behaviour motivator; this includes PEB. Therefore, environmentally friendly behaviour may be characterised as morally demanding”.

Beliefs are said to influence environmental concern or moral obligation to take action, which is related to the strength of an individual’s environmental attitude (Feinberg & Willer, 2013:56). Chen (in Feinberg & Willer, 2013:56) can attest to the powerful sway that moral obligation and concern has over attitudes and behaviour of individuals. Mullen believes that when a person’s attitude is rooted in moral obligation they are more likely to believe that their attitude is correct because they are emotionally attached (Feinberg & Willer, 2013:56). According to Schwartz’ Norm-Activation-Theory (NAT), the more an individual recognises the consequences of environmental degradation, the more personally responsible they will feel. This, according to Van Liere and Dunlap (Dunlap *et al.*, 2000), should increase their moral obligation in terms of PEB (Feinberg & Willer, 2013:57).

The belief that consumers that are informed and have an understanding of what is going on will most likely become more aware of their consequences and feel a responsibility or moral obligation to take action to express a more “environmentally friendly behaviour” (Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7685). Although Dunlap and Jones (cited in Takács-Sánta, 2007:27) are in agreement that knowledge is a precursor of beliefs; Blake (cited in Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7685), believe that merely providing “an information-deficit model of participation” cannot close the gap that exists between belief and PEB. What people believe and how they react is not always the same. Gadenne *et al.* (2011:7685) express that it is not inevitable that individual consumers who are concerned about the environment conduct themselves in a pro-environmental manner. Barr and Gilg (2007:362) are in agreement as they cite the sustainable development strategy that “attitude and behaviour change is a complex subject. Information alone does not lead to behaviour change or close the gap”. The reason for this is that different people will respond to or interpret information in different ways (Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7685).

### **3.4 Situational factors influencing PEB**

This study shows that certain cognitive and affective factors including environmental beliefs and attitudes (Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7692), only make up a portion of the factors that influence environmental behaviour. There are other antecedents that also need to be considered that can affect intention to engage in PEB, including socio-demographics (age, gender, income and education), transparency of information, cost, comfort and convenience (Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7687). These can be either drivers or barriers to the rise or fall of PEB.

#### **3.4.1 Socio-demographic factors**

According to Mobley *et al.* (2010:424), there is a direct relationship between socio-demographic characteristics and environmental behaviour, with these characteristics preceding ERB. Understanding the background characteristics of individuals can provide further indication of their knowledge level and skill set necessary to engage in PEB (Mobley *et al.*, 2010:424). The following sections are based on research conducted and provide a brief overview of the most dominant socio-demographic factors of PEB; namely gender, age, income and education.

### 3.4.1.1 Gender

Research has shown that women are more likely to engage in PEB. Mainieri (cited in Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7687) and Blocker (cited in Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14137) found that when compared to men, women demonstrate a higher level of environmental concern and follow a more environmentally responsible lifestyle owing to their pro-environmental beliefs and attitudes. They are also more likely to be committed to PEB than their male counterparts. Zelezny, Chua and Aldrich (cited in Mobley *et al.*, 2010:424) claim that owing to their gender socialisation, women are more likely to express sensitivity to environmental issues. This can in turn lead to increased engagement and participation in PEB. According to Markowitz *et al.* (2012:83) participants are believed to be female, generally younger, relatively affluent and educated. Hines (cited in (Mobley *et al.*, 2010:423-424) disagrees with the above theories, instead asserting that there is no connection or link between gender and behaviour that is environmentally responsible. The debatable gender issue was further explored in the survey that was conducted as part of this study as presented under Chapter 5.

### 3.4.1.2 Age

Age is an important indicator when it comes to depicting environmental concern, according to Jones (cited in Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14137). Younger people, explains Bronfman *et al.* (2015:14137), seem to demonstrate a higher level of responsibility and obligation to environmental issues than those people who are older. This coincides with Markowitz *et al.* (2012:83), who agree that the pro-environmental individual is likely to be younger. However, research provides a mixed conclusion regarding the influence of age on PEB.

Barr *et al.* (2005:1434,1443) and Diekmann (cited in Bronfman 2015:14137) disagree to some extent that the younger the individual, the higher the PEB. They believe the “green consumer” to be of an older age and more concerned with the environment and engaged in the community. This, according to Barr and Gilg (2007:373), can be value driven and income related. Based on the results of an environmental behaviour study overseen by Bronfman *et al.* (2015: 14147) they concluded that “the younger the subjects, the lower their behaviour for conservation and ecologically aware consumption”. Bronfman *et al.* (2015) cited a review conducted by Dunlap and Van Liere, authors of the New Ecological

Paradigm (NEP), who concluded that owing to the fact that younger people are more concerned with the emotional and social changes that are happening in their own lives and so are less likely to pay attention to environmental issues and participate in PEB activities (Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14137).

#### **3.4.1.3 Income**

There are mixed conclusions when it comes to the correlation between income and PEB. On the one hand it is said that the higher the income, the greater the knowledge of environmental issues and, therefore, the more the individual is able to engage in PEB. On the other hand, people in middle-lower income brackets display more concern about environmental issues (Gifford & Sussman, 2012:4). Barr *et al.* believe that older people of a higher education level and on a lower income are more engaged in the community and are more inclined to be “greener consumers” (Barr & Gilg, 2007:373; Barr, Gilg & Ford, 2005:1426).

Research pertaining to the former statement shows that the higher the income, the greater the concern for environmental issues and the more likely individuals are to change their environmental purchasing habits and to adopt changes in their household behaviour, i.e. through recycling. Bronfman explains that the reason for this could be that “people with greater resources have already met their basic needs and as a result can concentrate on other needs” (Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14138). It is also argued that with higher income normally comes higher education and an increased level of awareness, which brings about an increased moral obligation and responsibility to engage in PEB activities.

#### **3.4.1.4 Education**

Research shows that there is a positive correlation between education and environmentally responsible behaviour. Research also shows that the higher the education and environmental knowledge of an individual, the more likely they are to show concern for environmental issues and the more willing to adhere to and engage in PEB and to influence environmental action (Mobley *et al.*, 2010:423-424,427; Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14138; Barr & Gilg, 2007:364).

According to Hunger and Volk (1990) cited in Mobley *et al.* (2010:427), having an understanding of ecology is an important factor to consider when explaining environmentally responsible behaviour. Traditionally, in an effort to motivate individuals to change their behaviour, environmental education focussed on formal education programmes where informal education also took place in the form of reading environmental literature. Gardner and Steyn also cited in Mobley *et al.* (2010:424-425) believe this informal setting to “be an effective intervention for changing individuals’ behaviour” and that these “shaped one’s level of concern about the orientation toward the environment”.

Based on Monroe’s views cited in Mobley *et al.* (2010:427) on conservation behaviour and his support of the connection between environmental knowledge and attitude and concern, reading nature-based literature may increase one’s level of general environmental knowledge, which may influence values and attitudes and, ultimately, behaviour. Books that were said to have an affect include *Walden* by Henry Thoreau (1854), *A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold (1949) and *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson (1962) (Mobley *et al.*, 2010:425).

According to Fishbein and Ajzen (in Mobley *et al.*, 2010:436), authors of *The Theory of Planned Behaviour* and the *Theory of Reason Action*, individuals whose levels of environmental reading were high showed increased levels of environmentally responsible behaviour. Fishbein and Ajzen believe that specific rather than general attitudes are better indicators of environmental behaviour and that reading promotes increased PEB. They suggest that community book clubs or education efforts be initiated.

However, some researchers disagree with these authors. They believe that, although reading environmental literature can lead to increased levels of concern and increased PEB, it can also have an adverse effect where instead of promoting PEB it can leave the reader “feeling powerless and action paralysis” (Mobley *et al.*, 2010:437). Dunlap *et al.* (2000) believe that knowledge is an antecedent of beliefs that can increase environmental concern which can influence behaviour however, merely providing information in the form of “education” is not enough to fill the value-belief gap to engage in PEB and to see a change (Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7685). Blake (cited in Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7685), believes that providing “an information-deficit model of participation” cannot close this gap. The reason for this is that different people will respond to or interpret information in different ways.



According to Gadenne *et al.* (2011:7685), the knowledge publics hold regarding environmental issues has been linked to environmental behaviour that are positive in nature. They believe that this knowledge helps consumers become more aware of environmental issues and, as such, more concerned with the issue taking up some form of environmental action, which then encourages other people to take up the same action. This results in a normative and demonstration effect starting to take place.

There are, however, other factors that can cause a barrier to environmental behaviour and prevent a normative effect from taking place, such as cost, convenience, comfort and compliance, discussed below.

### **3.4.2 Cost, convenience, comfort and compliance**

Cost is said to be one of the biggest barriers to adopting PEB. Traditionally it is to be believed that environmental concern was seen as a luxury for wealthy people, which according to Bronfman is not supported across different cultures (Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14135).

As discussed in 3.4.1.3 and 3.4.1.4, it has been said that the higher the income and education the greater the knowledge and with that awareness of environmental issues is increased along with the concern and responsibility to engage in PEB behaviour. Therefore, possessing a higher earnings and higher-level education status might afford people the opportunity to engage more in certain environmental behaviour (Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14138).

According to Barr and Gilg (2007:373), the green consumer is in an older age group, higher educated, earns a lower income and is active in the community. The anomaly here is that those of lower incomes will probably buy environmentally responsible products, which are influenced by price. They are also influenced by other factors, such as health, safety and moral obligations but these are minor factors in comparison to cost.

For those residing in poorer nations, cost is a real issue. These nations are more supportive of ameliorating environmental problems, as they will be among the first to bear the worst impacts of climate change. This is worsened by the rise in global inequality as revealed by Oxfam (2014) when they released statistics at DAVOS stating that more than half of the world's wealth will be owned by just one percent of the population. Agreements like the Paris Agreement (United Nations, 2015:3-15) encourage richer countries such as



the US, one of the biggest emitters, to contribute financially to poorer countries (Resnick, 2017).

Gadenne *et al.* (2011:7686) cited a study conducted by Vermillion and Peart (2010) who state that, in the current economic climate the percent of consumers not prepared to pay more for sustainable products was 65 percent. Conversely, a public opinion and climate change policy study conducted in Australia by Pietsch and McAllister (cited in Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7686), showed there to be “a widespread willingness to pay higher prices for environmental protection”. This seems to be the case for South Africa as well. According to a local South African online survey completed by Ogilvy Earth for South Africa that shows the green consumer is prepared to pay a little more for a product they believe to be “environmentally friendly” (GreenEdge, 2011).

The price of a product significantly influences both the intention and the behaviour of the individual. Those consumers who are prepared to pay more for products that are “green” are the ones who will buy the products and use them as they are already further down the “green” journey. In addition, the moral motivations for acting or being morally compelled to act, can also influence the purchasing of products. The influence of price on organic, fair trade and recycling goods is well supported which confirms the influence of price concerns (Barr & Gilg, 2007:372).

Other key economic reasons that prevent the adoption of PEB include the initial set up cost, the expected payback time or long return on investment, other spending priorities and non-ownership of the property that is being rented. These factors can limit what an individual is able to install or change and act as environmental barriers (Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7686).

Convenience also plays a role in the adoption of PEB. The geographical location or logistical ease of purchasing the product or produce, as well as the ease-of-use when it comes to adopting behaviour, i.e. recycling or installing water or energy saving devices, can influence the behaviour of the individual (Barr & Gilg, 2007:364). There is a cost related to not only being able to purchase petrol for transport or purchasing these devices but also with the cost of age and being able to drive (Barr & Gilg, 2007:373).

Over and above cost and convenience, sacrificing comfort is a big influencer when it comes to encouraging individuals to engage in PEB. According to Barr and Gilg (2007:374) the influence of environmental and moral beliefs and the willingness to sacrifice

comfort, are psychologically, the most significant items in predicting environmental intention.

According to an environmental behaviour study by Dolnicar and Grün (2009:693-714), the majority of individuals that travel engage in fewer PEBs while on holiday than when at home. The reason being is that at home individuals have the infrastructure and resources readily available and are willing to make more of an effort for the environment within which they live; however, when on holiday they do not want that extra responsibility and tend towards more self-serving behaviour.

Financial incentives and rebates have been used by governments in some countries to encourage and motivate PEB, such as encouraging publics to change behaviour or adopt new technology (e.g. purchasing and upgrading to energy efficient products). Motivators include discounts, grants, subsidies and other schemes, but not all consumers are aware that such economic incentives exist or are offered by their government and so do not benefit. Governments introducing direct regulations and compulsory standards for product performance and to prevent opportunistic companies from completing sub-standard installation work has been suggested (Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7686-7687). The introduction of direct regulations, penalties and taxes (polluters tax) could assist with curbing pollution and inefficient technologies. However, Zaccai (in Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7686-7687) believes that there could be strong resistance from consumers, especially if this affects their finances. This could also be the case for companies, who are liable to face massive financial implications for non-compliance of environmental law. It would appear that PEB is at its highest when fewer behavioural restrictions are imposed (Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14134).

### **3.5 Measuring general environmental attitudes**

Cognitive characteristics are said to be the main drivers of PEB. As research indicates, attitudes are a strong predictor of environmental behaviour, with some researchers asserting that these are the precursors to PEB.

Having an understanding of the general environmental attitude of an individual before communicating is a good starting point to help a company fully engage and communicate with publics on environmental issues, understand current general environmental beliefs, concerns and attitudes of their target audiences and help encourage PEB.

Having an understanding of this level can provide key information, essential for establishing objectives; supporting and adding value to sustainable decision-making processes; as well as streamlining, improving and developing strategies, educational content and sustainability knowledge based around the lives of consumers and society (United Nations, 2017:40; Schafer & Tait, 1986:9). Understanding environmental attitudes is also important if a company wants to communicate environmental messages effectively, directly and accurately, tailor their messages and channels to reach mainstream publics, create and sustain those relationships, build trust and especially if a company wants to change existing attitudes (Schafer & Tait, 1986:7,9) and encourage much needed PEB.

Many theories have been developed to predict, determine and understand what influences environmental behaviour. There are a number of theories that try to explain, explore and understand environmental attitudes and relevant behaviour of the population in an effort to try and find ways to intervene to be able to change existing behaviour (Klößner, 2013:1029; Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14135).

Research shows that Ajzen and Fishbein's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) plus Theory of Reason Action and Schwartz's Value-Beliefs-Norm (VBN) Theory are theories most commonly used in the sphere of environmental psychology (Dunlap *et al.*, 2000, Mobley *et al.*, 2010:422-423; Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14135) to define the relationship between attitudes and behaviour whilst Dunlap and Van Liere's New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) focuses on understanding the general environmental attitude of individuals.

### 3.5.1 The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

A study conducted by Gadenne *et al* (2011:7687) builds on Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)<sup>3</sup> which is an extension of the Theory of Reason Action (TRA) developed by Ajzen and Fishbein who believe that specific attitudes are better predictors of environmental behaviour than general attitudes (Mobley *et al.*, 2010:437).

The TPB "stipulates a social-psychological framework in which attitudes can be used to predict behaviour and intentions" (Mobley *et al.*, 2010:426-427). According to Klößner (2013:1029), behaviour is directly ascertained by the intention to perform the behaviour in question which, proposed in the TPB by Ajzen, can be seen as a general model of deliberate behaviour.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cleverism.com/theory-of-planned-behavior/>

The key driver to Ajzen's theory is an "individual's intention and ability to perform or demonstrate a given behaviour, which is assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence or achieve a perceived behaviour" (Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7687). The intention to perform a given behaviour is determined by the attitude towards that behaviour, the subjective norms connected to that behaviour as well as the perceived behavioural control (Klöckner, 2013:1029).

Originally based on Azjen and Fishbein's original 1975 Theory of Reasoned Action, a useful framework developed by Barr, Gilg and Ford (2001: 2030) was focussed on the gap between being concerned and having the intention to do something and then actually *doing* something to make change, which Barr highlighted as being the "attitude-behaviour" gap (Barr & Gilg, 2007:363). Research evidence has consistently shown that an individual's willingness and intent to participate in a number of environmental actions is contradictory with their behaviour.

The TPB theory has been successfully utilised in green marketing (Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7688) and has also been used to understand and explain environmental behaviour (Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14136). The theory is founded on the assumption that individuals are rational, that the options they choose are based on being beneficial and cost effective and that their behaviour is directly related to their behavioural intention, which is influenced by motivational factors including attitude, norms and perceived behavioural control (Klöckner, 2013:1029; Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14136; Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7688). Gadenne *et al.* further caution awareness to the fact that as intentions change over time, they become more difficult to measure.

The TPB suggests that people perform certain behaviour with positive environmental outcomes if they hold a positive attitude toward them, if other people expect them to act in that way and support them in doing so, and if they perceive themselves as being able to implement their intentions (Klöckner, 2013:1029). The theory has been criticised for failing to incorporate moral judgements (Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14136). Klöckner (2013:1029) whom agrees and states that, although the TPB has been strongly supported empirically, the theory has been criticised for not providing sufficient representation of the impact of morality on environmental behaviour and for inadequate prediction of repeated behaviour (Klöckner, 2013:1029). As discussed in Chapter 1, it is this repeated, sustainable PEB which in turn will ameliorate and decrease environmental impact.

### 3.5.2 The Value-Belief-Norm Theory (VBN)

The Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Theory, developed by Stern and Dietz (2000) (cited in Klöckner, 2013:1030), highlights the relation between values, beliefs and personal norms and how they directly influence behaviour. Klöckner (2013:1030) believes that the VBN theory is based on the assumption that behaviour is determined by personal norms. The VBN theory is also based on the premise that an individual's PEB is linked to a moral obligation to protect themselves, the environment and members of society. They are more likely to adopt a PEB attitude if this moral obligation exists.

The VBN is focussed on linking specific values, such as altruism (the selfless concern for others), to general values, beliefs and behaviour, as well as morals, including personal norms, many of which are highlighted and developed by Schwartz and Howard in the Norm-Activation Theory and environmental awareness, as can be seen in the NEP as behavioural predictors (Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14137; Klöckner, 2013:1030).

The theory describes five types of variables that relate to one another; namely, personal values, a general set of beliefs, awareness of consequences, ascription of responsibility and personal norms for PEB action (Mobley *et al.*, 2010:422-423). The VBN model proposes that personal values (altruistic/social, biospheric and egoistic) influence the development of the beliefs an individual holds about the environment. These beliefs cause the individual to become more aware of the consequences of environmental degradation that could unfold as a result of their behaviour, the more personally they will feel which will more likely lead to a moral obligation to take action which in turn activates PEB (Dunlap *et al.*, 2000; Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7685 and Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14136). Interestingly, the awareness of consequences is related to general ecological views of the world measured by the NEP.

Klöckner (2013:1029) is in agreement with Bronfman in that where moral values are high individuals are more likely to care for the environment and be more environmentally conscious. According to Mobley *et al.* (2010), self-efficacy, moral responsibility and behavioural intention have been identified as important predictors of environmentally responsible behaviour or PEB. Over and above, knowledge and awareness are recognised as antecedents of environmental attitudes and ERB (Mobley *et al.*, 2010:422-423). This is where communication plays an important role, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

However, Steg and Vlek (2009:311) criticise the VBN in that it appears to not give an explanation in situations defined by behavioural costs that are high or behaviour restraints, i.e. limiting the use of a car. These can once again be related to the barriers discussed in section 3.4.2 with regard to cost, convenience, compliance and comfort. Steg and Vlek (cited in Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14146) however, praise the VBN for being able to explain low-cost environmental behaviour and good intentions (the willingness to change behaviour).

According to Klöckner (2013:1030) the TPB and NAT perform poorly when it comes to repeated behaviour, but Stern's VBN gives a greater balance. The more a behaviour is repeated, the more it becomes the norm, which is needed to make a difference. Repeated behaviour is what forms habits and norms. Verplanken and Aarts (cited in Klöckner, 2013:1031) argue that habit strength should form part of the TPB "as an additional predictor of behaviour and as a moderator of the intention-behaviour-link for behaviour that are performed frequently".

### **3.5.3 The New Ecological Paradigm (NEP)**

The most frequently used environmental scale is the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP), previously known as the New Environmental Paradigm. Developed by Dunlap and Van Liere in 1978, it was later revised in 2000 to the NEP by Dunlap who, at the time of writing, is based at Washington University (Dunlap *et al.*, 2000). The original scale measured the degree to which respondents believed that the earth was sacred and needed to be protected (Gifford & Sussman, 2012:3). The new NEP is intended to measure an individual's general view of the environment (Best & Mayerl, 2013:693-694).

According to Mobley *et al.* (2010:426-427) the NEP "has emerged as a more accurate portrayal of changing beliefs about the environment". It aims to measure the general environmental beliefs of the relationship between humans and the environment. It comprises 15 questions, compared to the 12 questions in the original scale that provide information on whether the individual has an anthropogenic or utilitarian approach to the environment. It is not based on specific environmental topics, i.e. recycling. According to Barr and Gilg (2007:363-364), the NEP's focus is "around a biospheric-anthropocentric continua" to analyse the relationship between humans and the environment and whether humans control or are rather in an equal relationship with the environment.

Awareness of consequences is linked to a general ecological view of the world measured by the NEP (Anderson, 2012:262). These consequences echo the moral sway or persuasion discussed in sections 3.5.1 and 3.5.2. It consists of general beliefs, i.e. humans endanger the natural balance of the environment; that the earth has limited capacity to the number of people it can support and nature is not allowed to be controlled by humans. The NEP is used to measure general environmental attitudes. "The ecological worldview is related to relatively stable general value orientations such as biospheric values, altruistic and self-transcendence values (positive ecological worldview), egoistic values and self-enhancement values (negative ecological worldview)" (Klöckner, 2013:1030). Research shows that the NEP has been the most widely used scale to measure general environmental attitudes and has been widely endorsed (Best & Mayerl, 2013:693; Barr & Gilg, 2007:363-364).

Despite some criticism regarding the use of the NEP to predict environmental behaviour and of it being improperly grounded in social-psychological attitude theories, a number of researchers who have studied the NEP categorically argue that it does fall in line with recognised models of attitudes as it measures the general beliefs about earth and the relationship between humans and the environment. These researchers believe that values lead to the NEP, with attitudes being the antecedent of general beliefs (Best & Mayerl, 2013:693-694).

To further explore the general environmental attitudes of practitioners and to gain a better understanding of the overall environmental consciousness of public relations practitioners in South Africa, an online questionnaire was devised that includes the NEP scale, devised by Riley Dunlap and colleagues from the Washington State University, in North America. The decision to include the NEP scale is based on the premise that it is considered internally consistent (Anderson, 2012:260-261) and is the most widely used and endorsed scale to measure general environmental attitudes (Best & Mayerl, 2013:693; Barr & Gilg, 2007:363-364).



## Chapter 4: Sustainable Environmental Communication – The Gateway to Change

### 4.1 Introduction

The focus on environmental communication began in the early 1980s and stems from a study by Christine Oravec (cited in Cox, 2010:15) that covered two sides of a controversy between conservationists and preservationists regarding the building of a dam in a highly regarded natural site in Yosemite Valley. Following the destruction of the city and basic infrastructure, including water and power, by the San Francisco earthquake in 1906, President Roosevelt set his sights on constructing a reservoir in the Hetch Hetchy Valley, a protected area within the Yosemite National Park (Curry & Gordon, 2017:253). Previously an ally with John Muir, a renowned preservationist, for keeping the area untouched by humans, Roosevelt changed his mind and convinced the public that a more progressive view was needed in terms of sustainable use and management of natural resources (Curry & Gordon, 2017:254). Thus, the dam was built (Curry & Gordon, 2017:253-254). To many, Oravec's study was not only the start of the modern environmental movement (Curry & Gordon, 2017:254) but also of the field of environmental communication (Cox, 2010:13; Milstein, 2009:345). The view that the material needs of individuals determine the use of nature is still relevant today when it comes to making environmental decisions (Milstein, 2009:345).

Environmental communication, from a conservationist and preservationist view, later widened to include issues of health and environmental quality. A great example is Rachel Carson's book, "Silent Spring", published in 1962. This work brought to life the dangers and toxicity of pollution to individuals. Carson (cited in Cox, 2010:25) managed to translate the technical scientific jargon into a language that was understandable to the general public and gave rise to a sphere of influence. Other examples of dramatic environmental issues that came to light following this included the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986, the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989 and more recently the BP Deepwater Horizon oil rig that exploded, sank and spilled oil uncontrollably off the coast of the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. All of these were considered environmental public relations disasters.

As a result, scholars in the fields of journalism and mass communication undertook a study of the influence of the media and environment on public attitudes. This arena grew so rapidly that environmental communication is now considered a sub-field where theory and



research is focused on human-nature relations (Milstein, 2009:344; Cox, 2010:13). By the 1990s there was an increase of environmental communication conferences, networks and website and online resources. Journals also became available to communication professionals and scholars, i.e. *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture*, as well as the International Environmental Communication Association that coordinates research and activities worldwide (Cox, 2010:13).

Today, environmental communication is defined as a two-way process that comprises planning, facilitation, implementation and evaluation of communication processes and practices that assist in environmental problem solving. It promotes environmental literacy, supports sustainable environmental management practices and enhances stakeholder relationships (Barnard, 2006:1). As highlighted in section 2.3.1, the ISO encourages communication procedures that allow a two-way flow of information between the organisation and stakeholders.

Environmental communication can be described as a multi-disciplinary field whereby citizens, public officials, media, environmental groups and corporations raise concerns and attempt to influence the important decisions that affect our planet. The understanding of nature and people's actions towards the environment is not only based on the scientific information they receive but also on public debate, the media, the internet and day-to-day conversations (Cox, 2010:12). Stephen DePoe (cited in Hansen & Cox, 2015:13-16) defined environmental communication as the "relationships between our talk and our experiences of our natural surroundings". However DePoe warned that environmental communications is more than to "simply talk about the environment".

Environmental communication scholars are particularly concerned with the ways in which people communicate about the natural world because they believe that such communication has far-reaching effects at a time of largely human-caused environmental crises (Milstein, 2009:344). As a result, these scholars explore alternative ways of communicating and articulating human-nature relations because they believe that communication mediates human views and actions towards nature. The need for this arises from the fact that nature is currently seen as merely a resource for humans and there is a disconnect between nature and humans (Milstein, 2009:347). By using the power of communication, scholars can shape ideas and convey the true meaning of nature and the environment (Cox, 2010:15). The way people communicate "powerfully affects" the perceptions of how they see the living world, which in turn defines their relationship with nature and then how they act towards nature (Milstein, 2009:345).

Communication can help to shape and shift nature and aid transformation (Milstein, 2009:348). Examples include campaigns that aim to educate, change attitudes and mobilise support for a specific course of action. They range from protecting a rainforest to bringing to light corporate accountability in order to abide by environmental standards (Cox, 2010:17). In other words, communication influences our attitudes to nature, which in turn is reflected in our actions. Barnard (2006:2) is in agreement and believes that environmental communication and awareness strategies can promote environmental literacy, educate stakeholders on environmental issues and encourage and influence responsible behavioural changes. The way in which ecocentric, anthropocentric and ethnocentric attitudes can be interpreted can influence and inform all communication, from the average citizen to the environmental advocate (Milstein, 2009:347).

## **4.2 Two-way Sustainable Communication Dialogue**

Traditionally, communication was defined as one-way dialogue from the source to a receiver. Examples of this include most communication methods such as press releases, company intranet, newsletters and annual or sustainability reports. For many companies, most of the information communicated is seen as techno-centric and one-way knowledge sharing, leaving little room to listen and engage with stakeholders. As discussed in Chapter 3, having a one-size-fits-all communication approach or communication that is one-way will not be successful, owing to the fact that people have differing beliefs and will likely act in different ways (Cox, 2010:24). A one-way communication approach does not take the legitimate environmental concern and needs of stakeholders in account further widening the attitude-behaviour gap which can lead to a decrease in PEB. According to Theron and Mchunu (2014:111-128) moving from a top-down techno-centric approach to a bottom-up approach will also entail moving from a closed, one-way communication style to an open, two-way communication style.

With communication evolving as much as it has over the years due to new technologies and social media platforms, communication is now seen as a joint process whereby participants shape and share information through the conveying of messages, attitudes and feelings from sender to receiver in order to understand one another or to reach consensus (Burström von Malmberg, 2002:314). The dissemination of messages that aim to change the cognition, value, action and behaviour of a person or an organisation is

more likely to be effective with interpersonal and two-way sustainable communication dialogue (Burström von Malmberg, 2002:314).

This sharing of information by means of two-way communication is vital for companies to communicate their environmental compliance, initiatives, policies and practices towards the environment, as well as being able to engage with stakeholders to build trust and confidence and earn environmental legitimacy. According to Barnard (2006:2,13-14), the two-way exchange of environmental information between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders opens up the opportunity to share information on the organisation's values, environmental activities and performance and can also help develop responsive relationships and dialogue where the interests, needs, expectations and concerns of stakeholders can be adequately addressed. These concerns are often leading indicators of what might become financially material to a company in the future.

Two-way communication can also serve as an early warning system for looming environmental risks and to change public attitudes, refine current environmental processes and management systems, amend communication and marketing strategies, boost the image of the company, establish positive relationships and even attract new customers.

Communication can lead to much needed positive pro-environmental change as consumers become aware of messages and increasingly critical of the communication they receive, and thus become more independent in making informed choices or creating their own "voice" to add to environmental issues (Cox, 2010:12). When individuals engage with others in communication about shared concerns or topics that affect the wider community, be it through conversation, argument, debate or questioning, a sphere of influence is created (Cox, 2010:24-25). These "voices" can range from individual citizens to community and environmental groups, scientists and science educators, corporations and lobbyists, news media and environmental journalists, public officials and even anti-environmentalist and climate change critics.

Barnard (2006:2) believes that while many environmental problems are caused by a lack of communication, many can be solved by effective internal and external communication. Sharing and engaging with others in communication can make people aware of the impact of their actions on the environment that could evoke concern for a healthier environment, which could prompt a moral obligation to take action as discussed in Chapter 3. People will only be willing to adopt environmental values and make the transition to a sustainable

lifestyle after they have become aware of the consequences of irresponsible environmental behaviour (Barnard, 2006:17).

Success of this change depends on a well-planned environmental awareness communication strategy that does not simply focus on reaching a large number of stakeholders but rather on relating to them. The larger the campaign's reach, the more reliant it becomes on good [sustainable environmental] communication (Barnard, 2006:17). The incorporation of a well thought out communication plan that takes into account the environmental attitudes of individual stakeholders and the overall level of environmental consciousness of a company, as well as a stakeholder engagement plan that can create and sustain stakeholder relationships, will support and add value to the decision-making process, effectively promoting PEB (Harrison, 1993:243).

This has prompted public relations and communication professionals to facilitate more two-way interactions by opening up channels of communication that provide a platform on which both sender and receiver can engage, create dialogue and respond, as in the case of an organisation and their stakeholders (Gallicano, 2011:3). This calls for a new level of environmental communication (Harrison, 1993:242).

#### **4.3 Role of communicators in sustainable environmental communication**

The role of communicators is changing. According to Dr. Bruce Berger's article on Employee/Organisational Communications posted on the Institute for PR website (Berger, 2008), public relations practitioners today are moving from historical roles as information producers and distributors, to more strategic and advisory roles in terms of decision-making, relationship-building and programmes which help build trust, encourage participation and foster empowerment creating a strong foundation for successful communication that is conducive to open, transparent, authentic two-way communications and conversations.

As consumers become more environmentally aware and their concern for the environment increases, they are expecting transparency and more information and disclosure about a company's long-term sustainability goals, as well as proof of sustainability, particularly with regard to the environment (Gallicano, 2011:1; CIPR, 2007:1). As a result, the number of businesses that communicate their environmental business impacts, in particular environmental claims, has grown exponentially (CIPR, 2007:1). The increase in the use of

communication to promote a company's environmental initiative or claims has created new opportunities for communication and public relations professionals who are tasked with creating these "green messages". Today, one can find environmental communications professionals employed in almost every sector of the economy, including businesses, government agencies, law firms, public relations agencies, as well as non-profit environmental groups. As the stakes become greater, environmental communication is becoming more important and the tools for communicating are becoming more diverse (Cox, 2010:12).

This new role also gives public relations practitioners and communication professionals an opportunity to set standards for responsible communication whereby they can guide companies' sustainable [environmental] communication (CIPR, 2007:1). According to Petts (2000:273), the role of communication can encourage people to work together to reach sustainable decisions, including the setting of standards, product development, safety planning and the management of natural resources. Hickerson and Bsumek (2013:1) state that public relations practitioners will be responsible for providing reliable information, sound analysis and ethical recommendations on environmentally sustainable communication.

Through the process of managing how, when and in what way company's communicate their environmental ethos, claims or actions, public relations practitioners and communicators are in a powerful position to use communication as a tool to create and sustain stakeholder relationships, shift attitudes and perceptions and help and encourage people to adopt a more sustainable and PEB to mitigate negative outcomes and ensure a sustainable and economically viable development.

Public relations can play a positive role in sustainable development and sustainable communication. Rather than being seen as a short-term fix or a "green" spin on tired old press releases, public relations should assume a more vital role in creating and sustaining stakeholder relationships, one that will benefit the earth, people and the organisation.

This kind of communication cannot happen overnight. It requires a strategy with a longer, more sustainable time frame focus, one that sustains relationships that will benefit all parties. Stephan Schimdheiny, chairman of Unotec AG, Switzerland, speaking at the Business Council on Sustainable Development said that "Sustainable development, like business, is not a final destination, but a process." He continued to say that, although we

do not know the final destination, this should not provide an excuse for not moving in the direction of sustainable development (Harrison, 1993:328).

Sustainable environmental communication like sustainable development is not static, it is continuously in motion. According to the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) (2007), sustainability is characterised as a process that can be maintained at a certain level indefinitely and which focuses on providing the best outcome for both humans and the natural environment, now and into the future (CIPR, 2007:1). Harrison (1993:323-327) defines sustainable [environmental] communication as a continuous-results driven process of creating and sustaining long-term sustainable relationships between the organisation and its publics. Petts (2000:278) is in agreement and believes sustainable communication to be a process of proactive participation, responsive involvement and dialogue.

Sustainable development is more than just about the environment: it also incorporates social and economic issues and being “public-interest green” has become a general goal for many countries and companies (Harrison, 1993:327). In order to understand the public’s “green interest”, communication needs to be open, interactive, consistent and ever improving, with measurable results. Sustainable [environmental] communication, according to Petts (2000:273) involves both an element of an outcome (achievement of predetermined goals, resolution of conflict) and a measurable process (preventing unforeseen situations before they arise, identifying concerns and identifying opportunities) where stakeholders needs are taken into account, fed through the process and then shown in the outcome.

This new level of communication does not come without its challenges. Public relations practitioners and communication professionals are faced with high levels of distrust among stakeholders and the increase of unsupported, false and misleading claims which has given way to “greenwashing” which has led to increase in distrust and loss of stakeholder confidence and will not advance a good, lasting relationship (Harrison, 1993:328).

Harrison (1993:327) aptly states that for an organisation to be successful, an honest desire to deal with these changing characteristics needs to take place. In addition, according to Harrison (1993:324), “not having a handle on communication spells success or failure in your effective transition to a new ‘green’ world”. Companies and their public relations practitioners and or communication professionals need to go beyond being compliance driven, ticking the sustainability check list and move towards sustainable communication that fosters dialogue and public participation.

The challenge for communication professionals is encouraging their clients or managers to move away from the one-way communication model with a technocentric focus and invest time and money in stakeholder engagement, participation processes and co-production of programmes and projects that is more engaging and responsive, allowing deliberation, discussion and participation in the sustainable decision-making process – an underlying principle of Agenda 21 (Petts, 2000:270). This participation and communication is important in order to understand stakeholders and for the organisation to be understood to ensure sustainable development (Harrison, 1993:328). It also requires clear objectives, effective communication and integrated planning of activities, proactive development of skills and a rethink of educational requirements (Petts, 2000:278).

Sustainable communication provides an important opportunity for a company to not only create and sustain relationships with stakeholders but also, according to Petts (2000:278) to improve the credibility of the industry and the extent to which it is trusted. Public relations practitioners in general has gained a bad reputation of being called “spin doctors” but now the opportunity exists to create and sustain stakeholder relationships, build trust and confidence, shift attitudes and ultimately change behaviour to be more environmentally responsible and sustainable.

#### **4.4 Communication as a tool to close the attitude-behaviour gap**

In order to close the attitude-behaviour gap that currently exists between the positive environmental attitude and concern for the environment and the actual behaviour to reduce environmental impact and for communication to be successful, a culture of listening, understanding, interpretation, transparency and honesty needs to be established to create and sustain relationships that encourage successful environmental performance and the organisation’s mission (Harrison, 1993:325-326). In addition, the right facts and materiality issues need to be disclosed and verified and access to information needs to be readily and easily available. This enables stakeholders to make an informed decision based on the detail of the information provided (PriceWaterHouseCoopers (PWC), 2016:4). The following section highlights ways in which organisations can create and sustain stakeholder relationships.



#### **4.4.1 Understanding environmental attitudes and behaviour change**

Sustainable communication is about creating dialogue and sustaining relationships with stakeholders. Knowing what is important to stakeholders makes them feel valued and heard and helps build trust and instil confidence. Part of this personal engagement is understanding that sustainability issues and environmental attitudes will differ for each individual stakeholder. Whereas lack of water resources might be a concern for one community or person, the threat of no energy might be a concern for another.

There are factors that can cause a person to either change or be inconsistent with his or her attitudes including a person's habits, social norms and the expected consequence of behaviour (Schafer & Tait, 1986:4). Some factors addressed in Chapter 3 of this study, include demographics, such as age, gender, education and income; and/or situational barriers, including cost, convenience, compliance and comfort. These defining attitudes influence decision-making and can play a major role in affecting actions by either increasing or decreasing the quality of environmental actions and behaviour (Schafer & Tait, 1986:3). According to Klöckner (2013:1028), an understanding needs to be gained of people's actions and decisions when making an environmental decision in order to identify the determinants of human environmental behaviour that is pivotal to changing their behaviour. This understanding is important and should form part of a stakeholder engagement and sustainable communication planning process.

In order for a company to fully engage and communicate with stakeholders on environmental issues, it is important to take into account the current environmental attitudes of each individual before communicating. From this information, a company will be able to gauge an understanding of the general level of environmental consciousness of a target audience, which can provide key information, essential for establishing objectives; supporting and adding value to sustainable decision-making processes; as well as streamlining, improving and developing strategies, educational content and sustainability knowledge based around the lives of consumers and society (United Nations, 2017:40; Schafer & Tait, 1986:9). Understanding environmental attitudes is also important if a company wants to communicate environmental messages more effectively, directly and accurately, tailor their messages and channels to reach mainstream stakeholders, create and sustain those relationships, build trust and especially if a company wants to change existing attitudes (Schafer & Tait, 1986:7,9) and encourage much needed PEB.



In section 1.1. public relations practitioners and communication professionals have been identified as key role players in shifting these attitudes and influencing behaviour by means of how, when and in what way they communicate the environmental ethos and actions of companies. This will be further explored in the questionnaire conducted.

#### **4.4.2 Authentic, honest and transparent communication**

Owing to the fact that stakeholders are demanding more information and proof of sustainability, particularly with regard to the environment, trust and transparency have become key to communication strategies. What management needs to be aware of is the fact that the internet is a growing platform whereon the public is able to search and source information. If the company is not transparent and communicative, then the public are more likely to search the internet for information, which can often lead to misleading data, thereby altering their perception and trust of the company, as well as their decision-making. The downfall of not engaging or communicating could therefore cost the company not just in potential costs, but also by placing the company's reputation at risk (ISO, 2006:8).

Telling the truth is fundamental and helps to build trust. Trust is recognised as one of the most important influencers on how people perceive risks and respond to communication (Petts, 2000:272). Gaining the public's trust is also a prerequisite for ensuring that they purchase and use products in a more sustainable manner (United Nations, 2017:18).

Although recent results from the 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer (2017:3,4) show trust levels to be on a fast decline in business, government, NGOs and the media, this distrust, according to a paper Petts published in 2000, has been increasing in business and government for some time. Interestingly, NGOs and media still held a middle ranking in terms of trust levels in 2000 (Petts, 2000:273) when compared to the 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer, which shows distrust levels of the media rising with 82 percent of surveyed countries showing distrust. It also shows NGOs matching distrust levels of businesses.

Distrust is challenging to communication professionals who are tasked to build stakeholder trust in order to create awareness, inform and educate all in an effort to shift perceptions, attitudes and behaviour. This applies to environmental communication where distrust is now packaged in the form of misleading environmental claims and "greenwashing" where companies profess to be environmental stewards but their words do not translate into

actions. People no longer trust companies and have little confidence that what they say and do is the same.

How people perceive trust is based on a number of characteristics, including consistency in communication; the level of competency and technical expertise; accuracy, openness and transparency of information; feeling valued, heard and represented; having their legitimate needs and concerns taken into consideration; and companies being accountable for what they say and what they say they will do. Petts (2000:273) sums this up well when he says that “one of the most positive trust characteristics is the openness of an organisation or decision process in terms of providing a platform for open debate, access to all information, and being willing to alter proposals and views after public comment – the characteristics which underlie the deliberative process of sustainability”.

How can this level of trust be increased? According to public relations experts, Harrison (1993), Barnard (2006) and communication associations like the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communications Management (GA); the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and the PRSA, building trust amongst stakeholders requires honesty, integrity, a culture of listening to discover the information they need, and open, transparent and dialogue-based sustainable communication. According to the United Nations (2017:18), sources of data and information should also be trustworthy.

Transparent and open communication is key. “Open communication builds the trust that makes for good relationships with the authorities, media and stakeholders” (Barnard, 2006:115). Transparency according to Rawlins (2008:5-9) requires a company to present information that is accurate, substantial and useful and void of secrecy, “greenwashing” and misleading facts. It is the responsibility of public relations practitioners and communication professionals to check all facts and claims before communicating and to abide by their professional code of ethics, which states that they will not knowingly or recklessly communicate false or misleading information and will continue to adhere to the highest standards of accuracy and truth in advancing the interests of those they represent and in communicating with the public (Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), 2009:2; Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA), 2011:2; CIPR, 2016:2).

When organisations are honest about their activities and policies and provide information that is objective and balanced (Gallicano, 2011:3), their publics are able to make an informed decision with all the relevant facts and information in front of them. According to the PRSA, disclosure of information is a great area of concern because many claims are

difficult to evaluate regarding their merit, truthfulness and/or accuracy (PRSA, 2009:2). The public expect information and disclosure from organisations (Gallicano, 2011:3), so it has become imperative that companies include and communicate the right materiality issues. Non-disclosure of a materiality fact that could influence a person's final decision can be construed as misleading and unethical.

Most sustainability communication seems to focus only on highlighting the successes and not the challenges of the sustainability journey. Companies should be equally transparent and include both sides of the story. By communicating the challenges and shortfalls, as well as the unknown regarding the sustainability performance (Himmelfarb, 2015) of a company shows transparency and openness and that the organisation, although faced with challenges, continues to stay on the "green journey". The focus should be on the process, the commitment to continuous improvement (CIPR, 2007:6) and creating and sustaining stakeholder relations that are inclusive, participative and responsive.

#### **4.4.3 Dialogue-based sustainable environmental communication**

Creating a dialogue with stakeholders is vital to sustainable environmental communication as it can help improve an understanding of how sustainability can positively affect business, add value and be beneficial to sustainability decision-making for both the company and its stakeholders.

Building trust requires open dialogue whereby the public can be responsive in their engagement with a company and vice versa. This responsive engagement includes developing a "culture of listening" to identify the legitimate needs and concerns of the public, interpreting and understanding their concerns and then responding with feedback. The International Association for Public Participation IAP2 Core Values for public participation state that the participation and contribution of interested publics should influence the decision and that the process should communicate the interests and meet the needs of all participants (Theron & Mchunu, 2014:111-128). The meaningful participation of participants, in particular local participants, in their own development creates being responsive and provides high levels of trust and credibility among the public (Mchunu *et al.*, 2016:149-186). When the needs and concerns of stakeholders are not taken into account, a disconnect exists. This disconnect can leave them feeling discontent. In an effort to close this gap, there has been a shift in communication from a process of

providing “balanced information” to one that stresses open and inclusive decision-making (Petts, 2000:271).

For many companies, engaging with stakeholders can be a time- and energy-consuming, expensive and tedious process, so many organisations stay clear of stakeholder engagement and public participation processes. Owing to restraints of participants, there is often not enough time to address all the issues and concerns stakeholders might have (Barnard, 2006:109). The same applies to public participation processes which is considered by some facilitators to be a time consuming, costly and compliance box to tick exercise with little authentic participation from stakeholders (Theron & Mchunu, 2014:111-128). Despite this downside to stakeholder engagement, the process should not be ignored. According to Barnard (2006:116) and Cox (2010:26-32), having a balanced representation of stakeholders is important. This includes staff, stakeholders, investors, government, community, scientists, media and environmental activists groups. Gallicano (2011:13) agrees with these authors and states that, “members of the critical public should not necessarily be ignored. They have legitimate requests for information and requests for change, and some of them spread false information due to their own lack of research”.

This new approach also requires communicators to make the shift. The role of public relations in sustainable communication is the creation and maintaining of stakeholder relationships (Harrison, 1993:327), taking the time to engage with stakeholders, and understanding who they are, as well as their legitimate needs, concerns and requests for change (Gallicano, 2011:13). Harrison (1993:185) believes that one of the benefits of stakeholder engagement is a level of control whereby stakeholders’ questions can be anticipated. Companies can know who the individuals are that make up their target audience.

Author of “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People”, Stephen Covey states, “Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply” (Covey, 1989:152). Harrison (1993:40) also believes that listening to stakeholders and asking them questions is the best way to get the required information, to show interest and commitment to a positive outcome and to show that a company wants to be part of a solution they can support. Listening allows the communicator to understand an individual’s point of view and identify their concerns and legitimate needs.

Developing a “culture of listening” and regular engagement needs to be adopted across the organisation (Rensburg, 2012:10-11). Not only does listening and responding make a

stakeholder feel valued and heard, it builds trust through respectful and enduring relationships with stakeholders and the wider community (Barnard, 2006:12). It also provides a research-based process to help companies identify and assess current and potential environmental opportunities and aids an understanding of public attitudes (Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, 2012; Harrison, 1993:39). “Stakeholders can add a lot of value to the planning process by contributing specialised or local knowledge, proposing innovative alternative development options or solutions to environmental problems” (Barnard, 2006:105). When it comes to authentic public participation, Theron and Mchunu (2014:111-128) are in agreement that local beneficiaries possess “experience and knowledge, both indigenous knowledge and modern” and they know their own situation better than external change agents, which can add value to the planning and participation process.

For many years, one-way communication involved companies speaking and stakeholders listening. Today, it is now important that the company listens while stakeholders speak. “Stakeholders should be regarded as equals in the process and their intelligence should not be underestimated” (Barnard, 2006:109). A company cannot form a communication strategy until they have listened. “The sustainable development era will still have a need for business spokespersons, but the greater need will be for business hearpersons” (Harrison, 1993:42). The information received helps communication professionals define key messages and build trust in the credibility of the message being disseminated – all key to sustaining relationships.

Responding with feedback is a pertinent element of dialogue-based sustainable communication. People want to hear from others who care, especially those in top management positions; thus, if a company comes across as uncaring or unconcerned, it will fail to build much needed stakeholder relationships. As Harrison (1993:41,43) points out, honest, lateral relationships can only be built with publics once a company hauls itself down from the mountaintop. “Grant that I may not so much seek ... to be understood as to understand” is a great line from a prayer of St Francis of Assisi that companies should look to when engaging with both internal and external publics (Boff, 2001:99).

#### **4.4.4 Competence and improved environmental knowledge**

Often, “green stories” can become lost in translation owing to the number of technical related jargon, emission statistics that occurs in environmental processes and practices.

Communicating these messages to the layman can be challenging for many public relations practitioners and communication professionals who have little or no training when it comes to environmental processes and issues (Hickerson & Bsumek, 2013:2).

Understanding the environment and the technical processes behind environmental claims is vital to sustainable communication. Public relations practitioners and communication professionals should be “familiar with the environmental and technical issues that are relevant to the application, as these concepts have to be conveyed to stakeholders in an intelligible way” (Barnard, 2006:108).

In order to rise above the “green noise”, public relations practitioners and communication professionals should look to increase their knowledge of technical processes and environmental issues. This could require an increase in a new skill set, a commitment to ongoing and continuous professional development, research and education. The PRSA (2009:2) suggests that public relations and communication professionals acquire and responsibly use specialised knowledge and experience. This increased competence and knowledge provides the communication professional with a platform to be a spokesperson who can communicate effectively and clearly on issues on behalf of the company, minimising the chances of misleading information being communicated (CIPR, 2007:7).

However, according to Petts (2000:272), simply having the technical knowledge or scientific expertise does not make one the best communicator. The ability and skill to engage with and relate to publics is also needed. Having the interpersonal skills to be able to “draw stakeholders into the process, clarify issues and explain how the proposed development or plan could affect their lives” (Barnard, 2006:108). Facilitation and conflict resolution skills are also important to ensure successful steering of any proceedings. The communication skills and attitude of the communicator play a crucial role in the success of the process. Communication skills are all-important as they shape public perceptions and opinion (Barnard, 2006:108). These perceptions can ultimately influence PEB.

This knowledge and education should be integrated early on in the communication curriculum at university. By integrating this knowledge, future public relations practitioners and communication professionals are equipped to effectively communicate about environmental issues. Some institutions might not have the capacity to “fit the time in” for what they believe is a soft science but it is important to realise that “communication that does not underpin sustainability, will not be sustainable” (Petts, 2000:277). There is a

greater need for transparency and openness of information and there needs to be a fundamental shift in communication training (Petts, 2000:278).

#### **4.4.5 Clear and understandable language**

The ability to translate scientific information into a language that is easy and simple to understand, as well as the ability to listen, interpret and feedback responses to stakeholders will add to the skill set required for effective sustainable communication.

Many environmental claims such as “biodegradable” or “compostable” are scientific or technical in nature and require competent and reliable scientific evidence (FTC, 2012:62123-62125), justification or substantiated evidence to back them up. Environmental claims are easier to understand for industry experts or those knowledgeable of the terms, but for many people, understanding these is difficult. Owing to the technical and scientific nature of environmental claims, it is also just as important to make sure that these environmental claims are communicated in a language that is simple and clear and one that individuals of all levels can understand. This is of particular importance for those claims that are difficult to understand or prove. How individuals will interpret certain claims will affect their decision-making, so communication should be as clear as possible (CIPR, 2007:5).

The growing number of environmental claims that is currently being marketed to consumers makes it challenging for communicators. Instead of “green” claims educating consumers, the abundance or over-exaggeration of these claims is confusing to consumers (PRSA, 2009:3). Consumer confusion with regard to the language around sustainability claims can be reduced by ensuring the language is clear and not intended to deceive or influence the consumer through false or misleading claims. That what the company says about their product’s environmental claim is important for consumers to know (PRSA, 2009:3), and avoiding the use of new terms or creation of new buzzwords (Himmelfarb, 2015).

According to the United Nations’ Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information (United Nations, 2017:25), clarity of communication is important. Consumers want clear messages and language to help empower and enable consumer choice, to inform their purchasing decisions, to know how to use the product responsibly and what to



do at the end of its life, be it re-using, recycling or responsible disposal. By using simple, clear and understandable language, companies can promote sustainable consumption and help consumers to take action. The use of graphics, having the information available in another language or having a language translator available at public meetings can help overcome confusion or inability to read instructions in a particular language. The following quote from Friedrich Nietzsche is a perfect fit for the above: “If you know the why, you can live any how.”

#### **4.4.6 Avoid making misleading, unsubstantiated environmental claims**

Many environmental claims as mentioned earlier are technical and scientific in nature and require justification or substantiated evidence to back up the claim. These days, it is no longer sufficient to simply take an organisation’s word when it comes to promoting an environmental claim. It is imperative that all claims are backed up by verifiable evidence or robust reference or proof points that provide a reasonable explanation for the statistics, statements or claims (CIPR 2007:5; PRSA, 2009:3). It is a prerequisite that a company’s sustainability claims are based on substantiated evidence in order to gain the trust of consumers to ensure they purchase and use products in a more sustainable manner (United Nations, 2017:18).

If a claim cannot be substantiated then it is best to either avoid making it or to find a credible third party to verify it. Having claims independently verified will go a long way towards adding credibility. In some instances, having professional audits of claims might not be possible, it is then advised to justify these. According to Rawlins (2009:71), guidelines exist to help organisations to be more transparent, but the real test is how the organisations’ transparency is viewed by publics, it is therefore essential that organisations provide ways for consumers to verify the accuracy of environmental claims (Gallicano, 2011:1).

Claims can be an exaggeration or misrepresentation of an improved environmental performance or ones that cannot be verified, are irrelevant or simply false (United Nations, 2017:25). According to the FTC Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims (FTC, 2012b:62125), “marketers must ensure that all reasonable interpretations of their claims are truthful, not misleading, and supported by a reasonable basis before they make the claims”.



The PRSA urges practitioners to re-examine environmental claims to ensure these are “clear, grounded in facts, information and data; and are valid, reproducible and appropriate” (PRSA, 2009:1; Hickerson & Bsumek, 2013:2). It is not enough to simply put a “green spin” on tired old press releases. There should be a very solid explanation and this should be clearly communicated (CIPR, 2007:5).

Sustainable communication requires honest, transparent and substantiated communication in order to gain credibility. The CIPR believes that in order to maintain the credibility of the public relations industry, the client or the organisation represented, all statistics and claims made in communications should be done so in conjunction with proof points. Public relations practitioners and communication professionals need to ensure that they have gathered the appropriate and correct information, that all environmental product claims are scanned and reviewed before being communicated, that what they are saying accurately describes the product and that all claims can be vetted, defended or substantiated (PRSA, 2009:3; CIPR, 2007:5; Parsons, 2008:142).

“It is important that messages are checked in terms of: benefits to stakeholders, proven environmental credentials, verified by an independent organisation, using industry standards” (CIPR 2007:3). “Communication needs to move away from just presentation of outcomes, to the ability to justify the process by which solutions, designs, risk estimates, decisions etc have been arrived at” (Petts, 2000:278). Parsons (2008:142) puts forward a valid question that all communicators should ask before communicating a message: if the claims you are making were splashed across the front page of your daily newspaper, would you be able to justify, defend and verify those claims? It is vital to justify a decision before making it, and then communicate it.

According to the CIPR (2007:4), before communicating an environmental attribute, communicators should ensure that a risk analysis is done and questions and answers (Q&A) developed for all sustainability communications. Communicators should look to reputable third-parties, such as ISO or The EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) for credible accreditation in an attempt to reduce confusion and to back up the robustness of their claim and obtain evidence of the claim being made. Horiuchi *et al.* (2009:8) suggests doing a “greenwash health check” throughout the company. The communicator should also ask questions, such as “can your actions back up the messaging during the tactical implementation of the campaign?” (CIPR, 2007:7), does the medium match the message? Are you sending out invitations on virgin paper for a recycling campaign or handing out a 96-page glossy brochure at your sustainable flooring

stand at a “Green Expo”? The CIPR recommends testing the validity of an environmental claim by talking to the media or industry experts and stakeholders – but to be careful not to divulge confidential information about their client (CIPR, 2007:7).

Many companies do not maliciously plan to mislead consumers, but sometimes the difference between aspiration and implementation can be blurred or exaggerated and the attitude-behaviour gap is further widened. The enthusiasm to communicate before all proof points are in place can result in the company being accused of “greenwash” despite having a better sustainability record than their competitors (CIPR, 2007:3). “Good intentions must be backed up by substance. Undertakings in public statements must be genuine and underpinned by first-rate environmental performance. If the organisation does not live up to its promises or acts unethically by intentionally misleading or misinforming its publics, its reputation will undisputedly be harmed” (Barnard, 2006:15-16). “Greenwashing” has the potential to demotivate consumers to purchase and use more sustainable products and penalise providers of information who adhere to appropriate guidance (United Nations, 2017:25).

#### **4.4.7 Provide credible, reliable information to the media**

According to Cox (2010), traditional media is driven by the mainstream context of delivering a news story (e.g. proximity, prominence and visual impact) so they disproportionately focus on hazards that are catastrophic and violent. They also often humanise and personalise risk stories by describing the plight of an individual affected by the hazard (Cox, 2010:210). This is particularly true of environmental disaster stories, where news portrayals are more often about sensationalism rather than an accurate portrayal of the danger at hand; often a common criticism from scientists and risk managers (Cox, 2010:209). Companies have the ability to be a credible source to the media by offering accurate and reliable information and in this way also control the message that is communicated.

Companies can play a key role by providing information that is accurate, verifiable and easily accessible to the media. Information must be easily and readily accessible in order to be useful to both the consumer and the media when and where they need it. A delay in getting the information to them can affect decision-making. The more accessible the information, the more likely the publics [including media] will take notice (United Nations, 2017:32). As with publics, if the media cannot find information, verify their facts or get

comment from a company representative, they will look for this elsewhere and it is not guaranteed that the information they find will be factually correct. This could cause them to spread false information due to their own lack of research (Gallicano, 2011:13). Gallicano (2011:3) states that even independently published information is influenced by the quotes, statistics and other information a company provides to the journalist. Being aware of this bias, journalists will not use the information frequently and, if they do, the information will be subjected to significant scrutiny. Owing to the limited information that companies have released over time pertaining to their sustainable business practices, companies have been able to steer the conversation to portray themselves as “environmental stewards” when in fact they often are not (Gallicano, 2011:3).

When communicating to the media, the CIPR suggests that one should: focus on communicating the news value of a story; ensure that the communication is relevant to the media and is accurate; not exaggerate or “spin” the story in order to get published; and ensure that communication to the media, such as press releases and invites to sustainability related events, are targeted to the appropriate audience. This will save practitioners time and money and increase chances of success. Taking the “less is more” route is highly recommended (CIPR, 2007:6).

The “one-size-fits-all” approach to communication should be avoided, as every person has a different approach to, value of, and interest in environmental issues. Having an understanding of those values, beliefs and attitudes will provide an indication of the target audience and how to communicate a company’s sustainability message more effectively. There are a number of key communication channels to reach stakeholders, of which the media is only one.

#### **4.4.8 Monitoring and measurement**

Data is king. One of the key takeaways from the National Geographic climate change documentary “Before the Flood” featuring Leonardo DiCaprio was “If you give people the data, you empower the people”. Data in this sense could include information, training and enhanced skill sets to make their own informed decision and choices.

In order to increase their knowledge, stakeholders require sufficient, accessible information and data in order to research the environmental actions of companies, trace how a sustainability claim was generated, understand what the biggest impacts are

burdening the product lifecycle and what improvements have been made. Part of this knowledge-building decision-making process involves a company being transparent about their selected methods and processes, data sources and even assumptions or professional judgements and value choices (United Nations, 2017:30).

Sustainable communication, which has been defined as the continuous results-driven process of creating and sustaining long-term sustainable relationships between the company and its stakeholders where communication is “continuous, open and interactive; it is consistent, with measurable results, and ever improving” (Harrison, 1993:323). To be able to measure and monitor results, this kind of communication cannot happen overnight. “An organisation should allow adequate time for the environmental communication to be effective” (ISO, 2006:21). It requires a strategy with a longer, more sustainable time frame focus, one that not only sustains relationships that will benefit all parties but one that focuses on continuous sustained improvement (CIPR, 2007:7). It is about focussing on providing the best outcome for both humans and the natural environment, now and in the future. A company should make use of environmental communication indicators that should provide valuable quantitative and qualitative information, i.e. number of calls, emails, visits to the website, articles published, social media following and visitors to the organisation, amongst others (ISO, 2006:21).

Tracking and measuring contact between the organisation and stakeholders can provide valuable information, especially historical data that is collected over a period of time and that will allow the organisation to monitor the changes that occur in their organisations and will help improve an “organisation’s effectiveness in developing future communication” (ISO,, 2006:18).

Measuring not only provides the organisation with an opportunity to foster effective and meaningful dialogue with stakeholders, it also allows them to see whether the communication programme was a success in the way it was conducted, if the communication targets/objectives were reached, if the target groups were heard, and if they were made aware and understood the organisational environmental communication messages (ISO, 2006:21). This information provides an opportunity for organisations to review and propose improvements to environmental communication strategies, policies, processes and activities.

A big part of the measurement process is the response and feedback from stakeholders as highlighted in section 4.3. that involves a process of proactive participation, responsive

involvement and dialogue. By evaluating their reaction, and interpreting their responses, the organisation can verify how the communication was received and whether it was understood by the target group(s) (ISO, 2006:20). Feedback is important as it can help improve the quality and reporting of environmental communication (Gasiorowski-Denis, 2006). Providing feedback makes interested parties feel valued and heard, which in turn lends itself to building trust and confidence. By responding to interested parties about the feedback they receive, the organisation will be able to show their publics that they understand their views, are interested in them and are prepared to consider them (ISO, , 2006:21).

As part of the study an online questionnaire was compiled in order to measure the general public relations practitioner environmental attitudes of PRISA members as well as measuring and identifying the current topics involving environmental issues and environmentally responsible practices, the channels used to communicate these topics and the intended target audiences of a company's environmental message. The questionnaire will be discussed further in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5: State of Environmental Communication in South Africa

### 5.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, this study uses data collected in a national online survey of the professional group of the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA). It is the first study of its kind in South Africa distributed by PRISA to examine how and in what way organisations communicate about their environmental impacts and practices, including the topics organisations communicate about, the channels used to deliver environmental messages and the publics most often targeted with these messages. The study also examines the characteristics of public relations practitioners and communication professionals tasked with communicating these “green messages” to stakeholders, including the demographic profile of practitioners, their level of environmental knowledge, as well as their general environmental attitude.

### 5.2 Review of the research problem

A review of the research problems identified in Chapter 1 led to the following hypothesis:

*“Through the process of managing how, when and in what way we communicate, public relations consultants and communication professionals are in a unique position to shift environmental attitudes and influence pro-environmental behaviour so that change takes place whereby being environmentally responsible will become the ‘norm’, and not just ‘compliance driven’ because of a policy, code, law or for a competitive edge.”*

The identified research problems are detailed in the following sections.

#### 5.2.1 Lack of stakeholder engagement, sustained dialogue and participation

Most businesses place attention on compliance, environmental performance and meeting regulatory requirements and sustainability targets, rather than on creating relations and sustaining dialogue with internal publics (investors, employees, suppliers) and external publics (consumers, clients, community, government, action groups, media); providing them with sufficient information or feedback to make informed decisions; and including

them in the decision-making process when formulating environmental and sustainability initiatives for a company (Harrison, 1993). According to Mchunu *et al.* (2016:149-186), putting participants at the centre of the decision-making process, opens up a “participatory space” in which they not only influence and direct, but also control and own “their own development spaces”. A lack of engagement, dialogue and participation in the sustainability decision-making process can leave stakeholders, including employees, feeling disregarded and misunderstood, which can make it challenging for companies to create dialogue, better connect, communicate their message, and persuade and influence environmental attitudes and behaviours (Schafer & Tait, 1986:7).

### **5.2.2 Lack of understanding of environmental issues and processes**

Many environmental stories need to be technically accurate and thus require training and a deeper understanding of environmental issues and processes. As a result, “green” stories can often become lost in translation. Public relations practitioners and communication professionals tasked to communicate these technical and scientific environmental terms often have little to no environmental training (Hickerson & Bsumek, 2013:1-2). For most, awareness exists around common pro-environmental activity, such as recycling, but a deeper level of understanding of environmental issues, such as the effects of pollution or the technical processes behind recycling, is lacking (Hickerson & Bsumek, 2013:8). This poses a threat to the validity of the article, marketing material, advert or media story, as many of the claims being made cannot be substantiated or backed up by verifiable evidence or reasonable rationale. As a result, this leads to poorly organised or inexperienced public relations efforts, which can create inappropriate or inaccurate “green claims” that mislead the consumer (Barter, 2016).

### **5.2.3 Lack of trust and transparency when communicating environmental impacts**

Concerns now exists amongst stakeholders that companies are motivated by saving and/or making money or increasing their brand reputation rather than by saving the environment. This has prompted stakeholders to demand more information and proof of sustainability from companies, particularly with regard to the environment. As a result, trust and transparency have become key in communication strategies. However, according to the 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer, trust levels are at an all-time low, having fallen below

fifty percent, which has a direct impact on environmental communications. Instilling confidence in stakeholders requires a level of trust, which can be a challenge for communication professionals to create or maintain as most publics have little confidence in these processes and do not believe that they will be heard (Barnard, 2006:115). To close the trust gap, public relations practitioners and communication professionals need to ensure open, honest and transparent communication as this will help build trust and make for good relationships with the authorities, media and stakeholders (Barnard, 2006:115; Gallicano, 2011:2). Failure to do so could result in the reputation of the company being harmed and a further widening of the gap between publics and the organisation.

#### **5.2.4 “Greenwash”, unsupported, false and misleading claims**

One of the biggest barriers to shifting attitudes and encouraging PEB is the unethical issue of “greenwash” found mostly in general environmental claims, such as “eco-friendly”, “green” or “natural”. Some companies make false or inaccurate environmental claims in an attempt to keep ahead of their competitors, portray “environmental stewardship” and enhance their brand value and reputation in order to win the hearts of the “green consumer”. Inconsistencies between a company’s actual behaviour and their “green” claims or “green” commitment threaten to weaken relationships between brands and publics and further widen the trust gap (Gallicano, 2011:2,4). Companies that intentionally “green sheen” their environmental communications run the risk of irreparable brand and reputational damage, negative publicity and loss of trust and confidence amongst stakeholders and investors (Barter, 2016). With consumers seeking authenticity in companies’ marketing and environmental claims (Gallicano, 2011:4), public relations practitioners should avoid “greenwashing” at all costs and take responsibility for questioning client claims if they believe them to be untrue or inaccurate (CIPR, 2016:3).

#### **5.2.5 Lack of understanding of environmental attitudes and barriers to PEB**

When it comes to consumer choice of environmental products and services, studies have discussed links between environmental beliefs, norms, attitudes and behaviour as discussed in section 3.3 in this study. Many of the theories related to understanding the antecedents of consumer environmental behaviour involve theories of cognitive behaviour (attitudes, beliefs, values and social norms) (Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7685), as well as



situational factors (socio-demographics, cost, compliance, comfort and convenience) that can influence the decisions made and can play a major role in either increasing or decreasing the quality of environmental actions or behaviour. Gaining an understanding of existing environmental attitudes will provide information that will assist in formulating a sustainable communication strategy that considers how the company can prioritise stakeholder engagement and public participation in order to establish environmental and sustainability objectives; meet their performance driven sustainability targets; create and sustain relationships with publics; build trust; determine exactly what, how and in what way to communicate to publics in order to communicate effectively and change existing attitudes (Schafer & Tait, 1986:9); and ultimately shift environmental attitudes and influence PEB (Schafer & Tait, 1986:7). However, it is not clear if the general environmental attitudes and beliefs of individuals are being measured as part of a stakeholder engagement plan before communicating environmental messages to the intended target audiences.

### **5.3 Objectives of the survey**

As stated in section 1.1, this study examines environmental communication through the lens of public relations practitioners and communication professionals who have their fingers on the pulse of the organisation's communication. The objective of this study is to understand the current state of environmental communication in South Africa by conducting a communication audit to examine the way organisations are communicating about the environment. The study does this by reporting on the topics these organisations are communicating about, as well as on the current processes, tools and modes of communication that the communicator uses to communicate the environmental initiatives of their company or as an agency on behalf of a company to stakeholders, the level of transparency of a company's environmental impact being communicated, as well as the current impact that environmental communication campaigns have on environmental attitudes and behavioural changes. The study also aims to understand how public relations practitioners perceive the environmental responsibility of their organisations and to explore the characteristics of the communicators – environmental attitude, existing knowledge and understanding of environmental issues and environmentally responsible practices, as well as their demographic profile (while examining whether these are related to the attributes of environmental communication).

The survey that follows is an adaptation of an environmental communication survey conducted by Bortree (2011b) with members of the PRSA. To date, a survey of this nature has not been conducted amongst public relations professionals in the South African context. This survey, if proven successful, could be used as part of future stakeholder engagement and sustainable communication strategy plans to help identify the environmental consciousness of a group of stakeholders in order to streamline messages and channels and to help shift attitudes to sustainable thinking, preservation and conservation in terms of nature and the environment, which is critical to the well-being of the planet.

## **5.4 Method**

As explained in section 1.5 of this study, the design and methodology follows a mixed-method approach consisting of both qualitative and quantitative data. The information and data collected from the secondary content analysis provides sufficient direction for compiling an online questionnaire.

This survey was followed by a semi-structured qualitative online questionnaire via Survey Monkey that was used as a mechanism to collect data. The questionnaire consists of questions and statements used to seek information, as well as data and statistics applicable for the study at hand. This method was adopted as it allows the researcher to determine respondents' perceptions of particular aspects of the research question.

### **5.4.1 Administration of the questionnaire**

Data for this survey was collected using Survey Monkey, a reputable online survey platform. The survey was conducted amongst members of the professional organisation of the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA), which currently promotes and communicates sustainability initiatives on behalf of clients or companies.

Participants were recruited over a period of two weeks. An email with a link to an online survey was sent the PRISA emailer database of 500 members in November 2018, with a follow up email sent in December 2018 to encourage participation. A pilot study was conducted with only minor changes made to the wording of the questionnaire.

This questionnaire was voluntary and respondents could decline to participate or withdraw from the survey at any point. The online questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes to complete. All information and responses to the survey were anonymised as part of the survey results data set. All personal information and survey data complied with the highest levels of confidentiality and best practice in privacy and security standards offered by Survey Monkey. The survey was also reviewed and approved by the Stellenbosch Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities) for the purposes of ethical clearance. A copy of the survey can be found at the following link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PCQGKWB>.

#### **5.4.2 Analysis of the data**

Once feedback was received from the respondents, an analysis of the completed questionnaires was conducted using Survey Monkey's statistical software programme in order to examine the data.

The results of the study will contribute to the author's understanding of the current state of environmental communication amongst public relations practitioners and communication professionals and their company or as an agency on behalf of a company. The data will provide insight into the kinds of topics and channels used to communicate environmental messages, as well as the publics with which they currently communicate. The data will also establish whether there was a shift in attitude and a change in behaviour as a result of the communication. As with Bortree's survey (2011a:1-2), results will provide insight into potential problems with current practices and offer recommendations and suggestions for future communication development.

The results of this study will be emailed to PRISA members, which will provide the public relations discipline with a better understanding of the way organisations are practising or communicating about environmental responsibility. This understanding of the current state of environmental communication amongst public relations practitioners could prove to be an invaluable tool in streamlining current messages and channels to help shift attitudes to sustainable thinking, preservation and conservation in terms of nature and the environment, which is critical for the well-being of the planet.

## 5.5 Specific Survey Questions

In order to address the first half of the hypothesis, “*Through the process of managing how, when and in what way we communicate...*”, the goal of this study is to explore how and in what ways organisations communicate about the environment. The study looked to explore: (1) topics, as well as priority given to key topics being communicated; (2) channels being used to communicate these topics; and (3) the target audience for which the communication is intended. To determine how and in what way organisations are communicating about the environment, the following research questions and statements were posed to respondents.

### 5.5.1 The topics and priority given to key topics being communicated

To explore the types of environmental responsibility that are given priority, the following research questions was asked:

*RQ: My organisation makes these environmentally responsible practices a priority.*

This question was posed to respondents to assess the degree to which public relations practitioners believe their organisation should be engaged in each type of environmental responsibility indicated on the questionnaire.

*RQ: In my opinion my organisation should make a priority of these environmentally responsible practices.*

In addition, the perception that public relations practitioners believe activist groups have regarding environmentally responsible practices was also included. Activist groups are key drivers of some of the changes being made by corporations so it is imperative that organisations seek to find agreement with this group and include them as key publics. The results of this question will help identify the differences between the ways public relations practitioners perceive environmental issues and the way they believe activists perceive the same issues.

*RQ: Activists believe most large corporations make a priority of these characteristics of environmental responsibility.*

The ten topics of environmental responsibility include lowering greenhouse gas emissions; reduction of fuel consumption; recycling; reducing product packaging; offering environmentally-responsible products or services; reducing waste; conserving water; improving energy efficiency; and offsetting energy usage. An additional topic relating to reducing energy usage as a behavioural change topic was included. Participants in the study were asked to indicate the degree to which they believe their organisation should be engaged in each type of environmental responsibility. Responses ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree on a five-point scale. Data from this study will provide evidence of the types of behaviours that organisations value.

### **5.5.2 Channels used to communicate these topics**

The following question was used to identify channels that public relations practitioners and communication professionals, working within or on behalf of organisations, use to communicate about environmental responsibility.

*RQ: My organisation has communicated about its activities in these areas through the following channels.*

Practitioners were asked to indicate which of the ten channels of communication they use to disseminate information about environmental issues and about the organisation's environmental impact and actions, services and practices. Channels included press releases; television and radio interviews; company website; employee newsletter; sustainability reports; company blog and/or newsletter; company social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo, etc.), webinars; special events, meetings, conferences and exhibitions; as well as communication via printed materials. An open-ended question was also asked to capture any additional channels used for environmental communication.

As highlighted in Chapter 4, the types of alternative platforms to communicate environmental messages have increased over the past few years. This opens up different and additional platforms with which to reach out and engage with stakeholders. Survey data will identify the channels that are currently being used by public relations practitioners

and communication professionals to communicate to their target audience and could suggest channels that can be leveraged for greater message reach (Bortree, 2011b:4).

### **5.5.3 The target audience for which the communication is intended**

To explore the intended audiences most often targeted with environmental communication, the following research question is posed to practitioners.

*RQ: The following audiences are most commonly the target of my organisation's environmental communication.*

To evaluate the degree to which organisations target specific publics with their environmental communication, participants were asked to indicate their intended audience from a list of six publics, namely customer-publics, employees, activists, shareholders, government and media. An open-ended question was also asked to capture additional audiences not mentioned, as well as the option to select “none of the above” for environmental communication (Bortree, 2011a:6).

According to Signitzer and Prexl (2008, cited in Bortree, 2011a:3), employees are usually the first to receive communication about the organisation as they are very often the key communicators about the organisation's environmental vision to the public. The same authors suggest that organisations first communicate with internal audiences “so that, slowly, employees get sensitized to the issue and a bottom-up process within the company is able to develop” (Bortree, 2011a:3). There are also activists, media and government that can exert pressure on a company. If they are not included in stakeholder engagement or part of a company's key messaging, companies could face negative publicity, loss of trust and confidence and this could affect their reputation.

Another goal of the study was to determine the characteristics of the communicators tasked to communicate these “green” environmental messages to stakeholders. This includes: (1) identifying the demographic profile of respondents; (2) exploring practitioner environmental knowledge and understanding of environmental issues and practices; and (3) measuring the current practitioner's general environmental attitudes and beliefs of respondents.

#### 5.5.4 The demographic profile of practitioners

The researcher requested participants to respond to a number of demographic and classification questions, including employer industry, employer size (number of employees), individual job category, years of service to employer, years of employment in public relations, level of registration received from PRISA and geographical area in which they reside. In addition, education, salary, gender and age were also included to provide more insight into the practitioners' demographic profile.

For the purposes of this study, the key socio-demographic factors that the researcher will focus on include education, salary and gender to see whether they are related to the socio-demographic factors said to influence PEB. The following research questions were posed in relation to this:

*RQ: What is your highest level of education?*

*RQ: What best describes your salary?*

*RQ: What gender are you?*

As argued in section 3.4.1 according to Mobley *et al.* (2010:424), there is a direct relationship between socio-demographic characteristics and environmental behaviour, with these characteristics preceding ERB. Understanding the background characteristics of individuals can provide further indication of the knowledge level and skill set necessary to engage in PEB. Cognitive and affective factors, such as attitudes, values, beliefs and social norms only make up a portion of the factors that influence environmental behaviour. There are other antecedents that need to be considered when it comes to better understanding PEB and variables that can affect intention to engage in PEB, including socio-demographics (age, gender, income and education) (Gadenne *et al.*, 2011:7687). These can be either drivers or barriers to PEB.

### 5.5.5 Practitioner knowledge and understanding of environmental issues

Public relations practitioners' current levels of knowledge and understanding of environmental issues and practices were assessed by asking practitioners to self-assess their knowledge of seven key environmental issues, as well as the ten environmentally responsible practices identified by Bortree (2011a:6,8), using a five-point scale. The researcher posted the following questions and statements to explore their level of environmental knowledge.

*RQ: I personally have a good understanding of what each of the following environmental issues are.*

*RQ: I personally have a good understanding of what each of the following environmentally responsible practices are.*

The role of public relations has changed. According to Bortree (2011b:4), knowledge of environmental responsibility is critical for public relations professionals tasked with communication about organisations' environmental policies and practices. Public relations practitioners and communication professionals are tasked to communicate "green stories" to stakeholders (including the media) – many of which require technical and scientific jargon that can be challenging to convey to a layman without a deep understanding of environmental issues, technical processes or practices. Public relations practitioners have little to no training in the field of natural science. This can lead to misleading articles that can be deemed as "greenwashing".

In addition to knowledge level, participants were also asked to indicate the sources from which they had learned about environmental issues.

*RQ: Please indicate from which sources you have learned about environmental issues.*

Respondents indicated a list of sources from where they had learned about environmental issues, including websites (search engines, blogs, online resources); social media (influencers, company, organisations); podcasts or radio; newspapers and magazines; reading books on environmental issues; in-house training or seminars; external training or seminars; workshops or conferences; college, university or online webinars; courses; certifications; and talking with colleagues, family or friends. This was followed by an open-



ended question that asked for any additional sources that participants felt were important for building their knowledge about the environment.

### **5.5.6 Current practitioner general environmental beliefs and attitudes**

To determine and establish a benchmark of current general environmental beliefs and environmental attitudes of public relations practitioners and communication professionals residing in South Africa, a New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) Scale, devised by Riley Dunlap and colleagues from the Washington State University in North America was incorporated into the online survey.

The NEP scale forms part of the key methodology of the study and measures the environmental concerns of groups of people using a survey instrument constructed of 15 statements that reflect pro-environmental or anti-environmental attitudes (Anderson, 2012:260). It covers five facets of an ecological worldview: the reality of limits to growth (1,6,11); anti-anthropocentrism (2,7,12); the fragility of nature's balance (3,8,13); rejection of exemptionalism (4,9,14); and the possibility of an eco-crisis (5,10,15).

*RQ: The statements that reflect pro-environmental attitudes include items 1,3,5,7,9,11,13,15. These eight odd-numbered items are worded so that agreement indicates a pro-ecological view.*

*RQ: The statements that reflect anti-environmental attitudes include items 2,4,6,8,10,12,14. These seven even-numbered items are worded so that disagreement indicates a pro-ecological worldview.*

The NEP scale has become the most widely used measure of an “ecological worldview” (Dunlap *et al.*, 2000:427). Furthermore, the scale is considered to be internally consistent and is currently used to assess the relationship of environmental worldviews or attitudes on public policy to PEB (Anderson, 2012:260-261).

### **5.5.7 Shift in environmental attitudes and behaviour change**

In order to address the second half of the hypothesis as per section 1.4.3 of this study “public relations consultants and communication professionals are in a unique position to

shift environmental attitudes and influence PEB so that change takes place whereby being environmentally responsible will become the 'norm', and not just 'compliance driven' because of a policy, code, law or for a competitive edge", the questionnaire sought to determine if a shift in environmental attitudes and behaviour change has taken place as a result of communication. The survey investigated the current environmental impact and behaviour change communication campaigns that public relations practitioners and communication professionals have been involved in, what the goals of the campaign were (i.e. to reduce the use of plastic bags), and if the campaign achieved its desired environmental impact or behaviour change goal and if a shift in attitude took place as a result of the behaviour change communication.

The researcher put forward an optional question, asking respondents to expand on how the goal was achieved or alternatively what barriers or problems they encountered if they did not reach their desired environmental impact or behaviour change goal. The researcher regretfully did not include a question about the measurement tools used to identify how communicators were able to prove that a shift took place amongst stakeholders and suggests that this should be considered for future research.

The following questions were asked to determine if a shift in attitude occurred and if behaviour changed as a result of environmental impact or behaviour change communication campaigns:

*RQ: Have you been involved in any campaigns that deal with environmental impact or behaviour change, e.g. #banthestraw, Spar's Say No to Plastic, Day Zero, #Plogging.*

*RQ: If yes, could you tell us in one sentence what was the goal of the environmental impact or behaviour change communication campaign, e.g. to reduce the use of plastic bags?*

*RQ: Did you achieve your environmental impact or behaviour change goal?*

*RQ: Regardless of the success of the campaign, do you believe that a shift in attitude took place?*

### 5.5.8 Level of transparency of a company's environmental impact

As argued in section 1.3.2, a lack of trust and transparency when communicating environmental impacts exists. Ethical communication about environmental issues is critical for corporate reputation (Bortree, 2011b:5). This study aims to explore the degree to which public relations practitioners perceive their organisations as communicating transparently about the environment, as well as their perception of the level of transparency communicated by other competitor companies.

Transparency is defined by Rawlins (2008:5-9) as having these important elements: (1) substantial information that is truthful, useful and helps stakeholders make an informed judgement about an organisation; (2) participation of stakeholders, which is the act of engaging with publics through dialogue and feedback loops that helps publics to identify the information they need; (3) accountability with regard to acting responsibly and being accountable for what a company says they will do and answering for decisions made by the company; and (4) a lack of secrecy and “greenwashing” (which was a reverse item factor measuring the opposite of openness) where information is disclosed and an open atmosphere for communication is fostered. Greenwashing has been defined as misleading or deliberately hiding actions. Responses were measured using a five-point scale.

*RQ: My company provides useful information about its environmental behaviours to key publics for making informed decisions.*

*RQ: I think my company wants to be accountable to key publics and therefore communicates transparently about its impact on the environment.*

*RQ: I think most other companies communicate transparently about their impact on the environment.*

*RQ: I understand what “greenwash” is and the impact it can have on my organisation.*

According to Bortree (2011a:4), a transparent organisation is more likely to engage in communication about the environment. Quantity should not be the sole measure for transparency; however, it would be one indicator of a commitment to engage with key publics about environmental topics. According to Freeman and Gower (in Bortree, 2011a:4) organisations that engage in more ethical communication are perceived more

positively by key audiences. However, Hunter and Bansal cited in Bortree (2011a:4) suggest that most organisations are not necessarily engaging transparently in their environmental dealings. One way in which organisations can improve their environmental reputation is through transparent communication about environmental initiatives, impacts and products (Bortree, 2011a:4).

#### **5.5.9 Practitioner perception regarding environmentally responsible behaviours on reputation and bottom-line**

This study seeks to identify the degree to which public relations professionals perceive the benefit that environmentally responsible practices have on the environment in relation to a company's reputation and bottom-line.

*RQ: I feel that my company could benefit financially from engaging in more environmentally responsible behaviours.*

*RQ: I feel that my company's reputation would benefit from engaging in more environmentally responsible behaviours.*

### **5.6 Research results**

The respondent group is 57.89 percent female and 42.11 percent male. 63.16 percent of respondents have been employed in public relations for ten or more years. 52.63 percent of respondents have at least a bachelor's degree and 52.63 percent are APR and CPRP certified. 57.89 percent of respondents are classified as managing director, account director or account manager and approximately 36.85 percent are in jobs with titles including specialist, associate, consultant, account assistant or intern. 36.84 percent of respondents work for a corporate entity, with 21.05 percent working in the manufacturing and industrial industry, 21.05 percent in a public relations firm or agency and 21.05 percent highlight their capacity as a public relations consultant. 5.26 percent work for government, municipalities or military. There are a few additional titles not listed, including media or professional body of public relations. Geographically speaking, the population is fairly evenly split, with 52.63 percent of respondents residing and working in a large city, while 42.11 percent reside in a smaller city or town. The average salary of respondents is between R25 000 and R75 000+. Only 10.53 percent earn less than R10 000 per month.

As stated under section 5.1, the study explored the attributes of how and in what way organisations communicate about the environment. The following are the results the researcher analysed from the questionnaire. Results of this survey can be found at the following web address: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-Y9W7M7Y2V/>.

### 5.6.1 The topics and priority given to key environmental topics being communicated

As per section 5.5, in order to answer the research question about priority being given to the key environmental topics being communicated, participants were asked about the topics on which the organisation engages.

*RQ: My organisation makes a priority of these environmentally responsible practices.*

Practitioners communicated the most about conserving water (3.84) followed by recycling (3.79) and reducing waste (3.79). They were least likely to communicate about the reduction of fuel consumption (2.95) and lowering greenhouse gas emissions (3.21). See figure 1.

Q14 My organisation\* makes a priority of these environmentally responsible practices. (\*the company or client your work with)

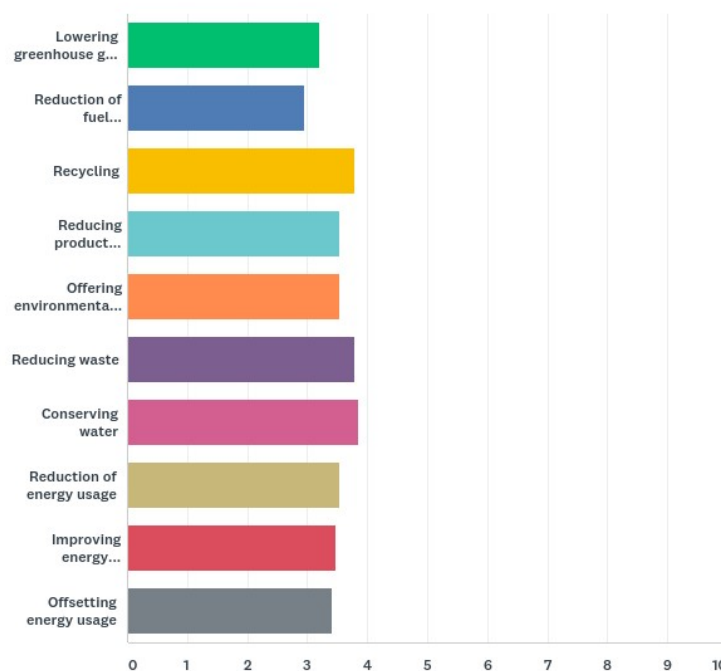


Figure 1: Priority of environmentally responsible practices

In comparison to the United States survey conducted by Bortree (2011b:11), organisations communicated the most about improving energy efficiency, recycling and environmentally-responsible products and services. They were least likely to communicate about reducing product packaging.

*RQ: In my opinion my organisation should make a priority of these environmentally responsible practices.*

Practitioners scored quite high on the five-point scale and believe that organisations should be prioritising all of the listed environmentally responsible practices. The highest priorities include reducing waste (4.74); recycling (4.68); and, equally high, conserving water (4.58); improving energy efficiency (4.58) and reducing fuel consumption (4.58). See figure 2.

Q15 In my opinion my organisation\* SHOULD make a priority of these environmentally responsible practices (\*the company or client you work with)



Figure 2: Organisational priority of environmentally responsible practices

Additional priorities that practitioners felt needed to be included comprise addressing issues such as rehabilitation, biodiversity and deforestation, including reduction of paper usage, as well as encouraging sustainable food production, community use and responsible end-land use. Communication and education was also suggested as a key

environmentally responsible practice, including communicating best practices, further awareness of environmental issues and practices in marketing collateral, urging employees to practice the same at home, as well as educating about minimising consumerism and discouraging materialism.

*RQ: Activists believe most large corporations make a priority of these characteristics of environmental responsibility.*

Practitioners scored very low on this scale with a mean average of 2.32. The highest three priorities that practitioners feel activists would believe most large corporation are making a priority include recycling (2.53), reducing waste (2.47) and improving energy efficiency (2.47). The lowest priority is lowering greenhouse gas emissions (2.21) and reducing product packaging (2.21). Many answers fell in the “unsure” category. The researcher believes this could be attributed to the fact that activists are not a main target audience, as indicated in the questionnaire, so there is a low understanding of their priorities. See figure 3.

Q22 ACTIVISTS (defined as members of activist organizations – World Wildlife Foundation, Greenpeace, Sierra Club, etc.) believe most large corporations make a priority of these characteristics of environmental responsibility.

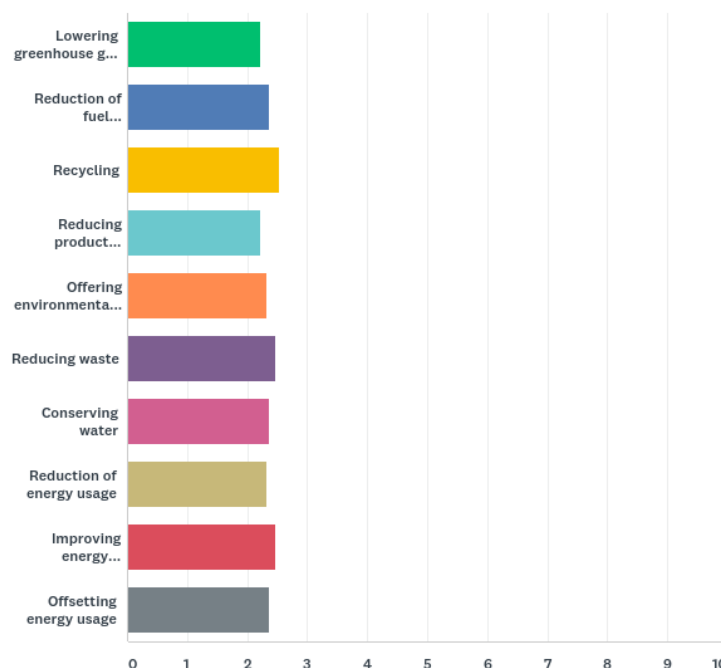


Figure 3: Activists priority of environmentally responsible practices

*RQ: In my opinion, most large corporations make a priority of these characteristics of environmental responsibility.*

Once again, practitioners scored quite low on this scale with a mean average of 2.85. Practitioners believe that most large corporations make a priority of reducing waste (3.16) and recycling (3.00), as well as improving energy efficiency measures (3.05) and offsetting energy usage (3.00). They feel that most large corporations focus little on lowering greenhouse gas emissions (2.58) and the reduction of fuel consumption (2.68). See figure 4.

Q21 In my opinion MOST LARGE CORPORATIONS make a priority of these characteristics of environmental responsibility.

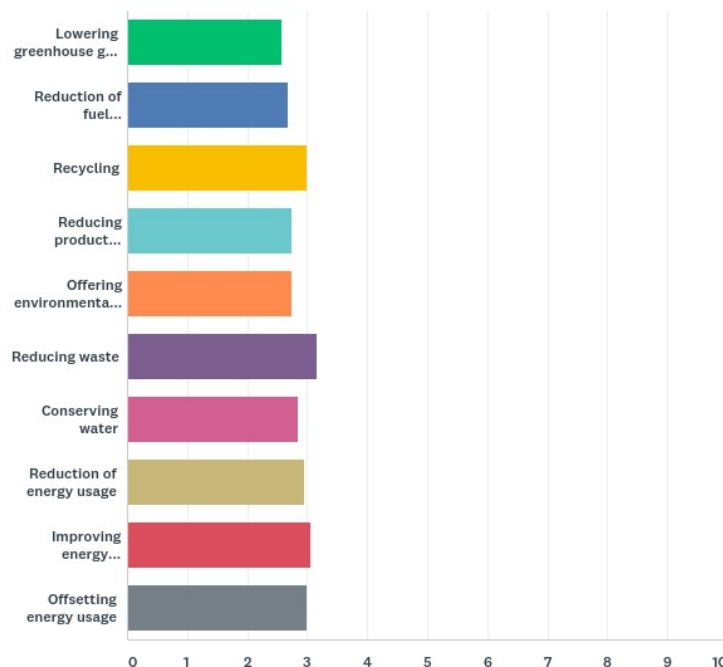


Figure 4: Large corporations priority of environmentally responsible practices

### 5.6.2 The channels being used to communicate these environmental topics

*RQ: My organisation has communicated about its activities in these areas through the following channels.*

To identify the communication channels most commonly employed to deliver environmental messages, the survey asked participants to tick all applicable communication channels from a list of ten items. The number of respondents that indicated



that the company website and employee newsletter are seen as the main channels of communicating environmental messages was 47.37 percent. This was followed by press releases, social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Vimeo) and company blog sites. The author notes that the highest channels are technocentric, one-way communication. See figure 5.

Q18 My organisation\* has communicated about its activities in these areas through the following channels. (\*the company or client you work with)(Tick all that apply)

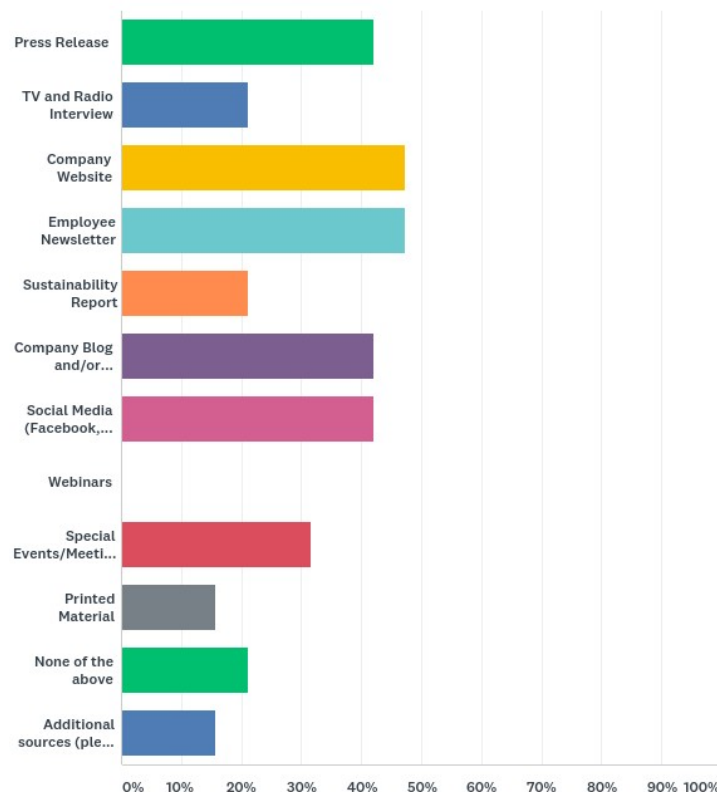


Figure 5: Communication channels

To capture other channels of communication being used by organisations for environmental messages, an open-ended question was put forward. Participants were asked if their organisation uses other means to communicate about the environment. Results indicate that organisations are using annual reports and workplace media, e.g. posters, employee briefs and environmental themes as additional channels.

According to Bortree's US survey conducted in 2011, the most commonly used channels were intranet, websites and employee newsletters. Least used channels at this time were Twitter, Wikipedia and podcasts. The 2018 South African results are similar, with company

websites and employee newsletters being the most commonly used channels. Interestingly, Bortree's (2011b:9) respondents scored low on social media (Twitter) while South African respondents score higher, with their least used channels being webinars, special events and conferences, printed material and television and radio interviews.

### 5.6.3 The target audience for which the communication is intended

*RQ: The following audiences are most commonly the target of my organisation's environmental communication.*

To determine the most common public groups targeted with environmental communication messages, practitioners were asked to indicate which of the five public groups their intended target audience for environmental communication were. Results suggest that employees are the most common target audience for environmental communication (84.21 percent) followed by customer-publics (52.63 percent). Activists (10.53 percent) and government (10.53 percent) are the least common target audiences. The US survey had similar results, with employees being rated as the most common target audience for environmental communication and shareholders as least common (Bortree, 2011b:9). The open-ended question allowed respondents to include additional target audiences not currently listed. These resulted in clients and local communities being included. Figure 6.

Q19 The following audiences are most commonly the target of my organisation's\* environmental communication. (\*the company or client your work with)(Tick all that apply)

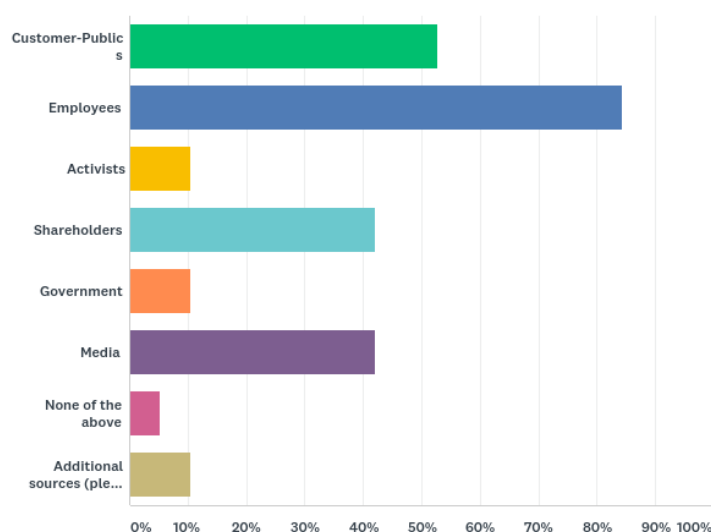


Figure 6: Target Audience

The study also explored the characteristics of the communicators. The following are the results from the questionnaire.

#### 5.6.4 The demographic profile of practitioners

*RQ: What is your highest level of education?*

To determine the highest level of education of practitioners, respondents were asked to indicate their highest qualification from a list of three items, including high school education, undergraduate degree or postgraduate degree. Just over half (52.63 percent) of respondents have a postgraduate degree (Bachelors, honours, Masters or Doctorate). The second highest level of education was an undergraduate degree (certificate, diploma or national diploma). See figure 7.

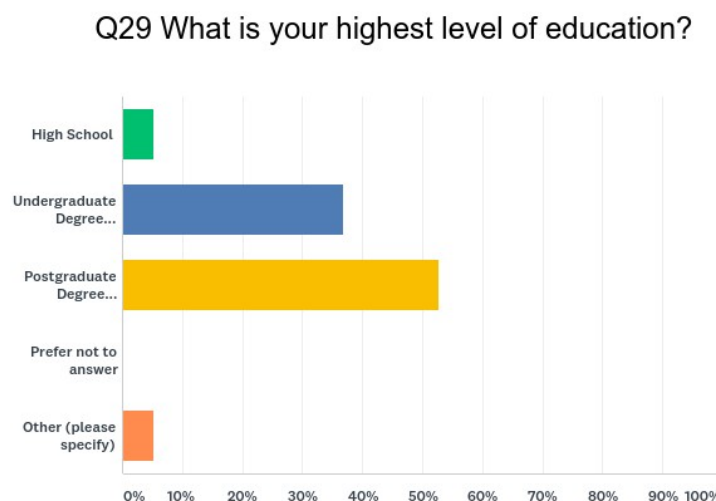
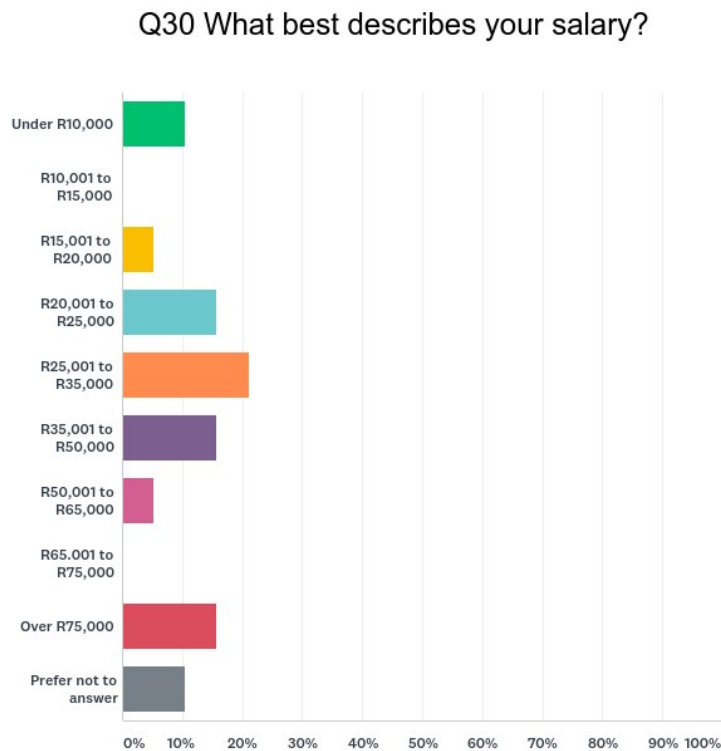


Figure 7: Highest level of education

*RQ: What best describes your salary?*

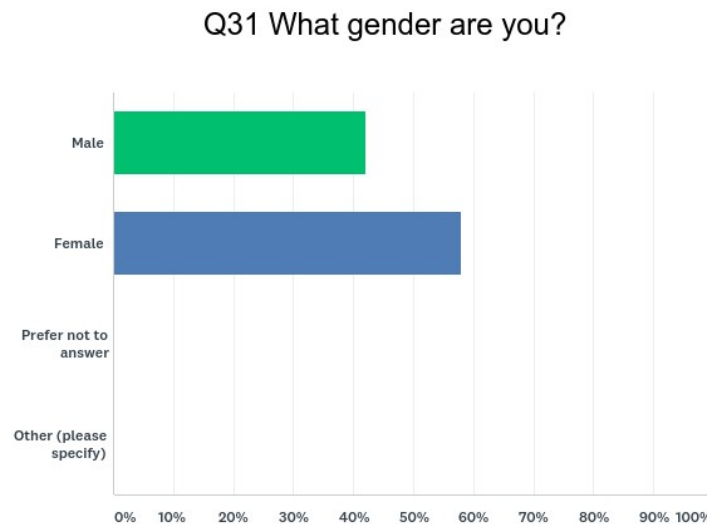
From a sliding scale of under R10 000.00 to over R75 000.00, participants were asked to define their monthly salary bracket. The survey revealed that 21.05 percent of respondents earned a monthly salary of between R25 001 to R35 000, followed closely by earnings of between R35 001 and R50 000, and a good percent of respondents (15.79 percent) receive over R75 000.00. Only 10.53 percent of respondents earned less than R10 000.00 per month. See figure 8.



**Figure 8: Salary**

*RQ: What gender are you?*

The gender data was relatively balanced, with most participants being female (57.89 percent), followed closely by their male counterparts (42.11 percent). From the behaviour communication campaign questions, it is interesting to note that, from the percentage of respondents that had been involved in environmental campaigns, the majority were male. This brings the notion about females having a higher PEB into question. See figure 9.



**Figure 9: Gender**

### 5.6.5 Practitioner knowledge and understanding of environmental issues

*RQ: I personally have a good understanding of what each of the following environmental issues are.*

This question asked about public relations practitioners' level of knowledge about environmental issues. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they have a good understanding of key environmental issues. Practitioners believe themselves as having a good understanding of climate change (4.42), land, air and water pollution (4.42) and the lack of quality and scarcity of water (4.37). Practitioners felt the least knowledgeable on environmental issues relating to biodiversity loss (3.84), and sustainable consumption and production (3.89). Interestingly, the researcher notes that these two items are later listed as priorities that companies should focus on. See figure 10.

Q11 I personally have a good understanding of what each of the following environmental issues are.

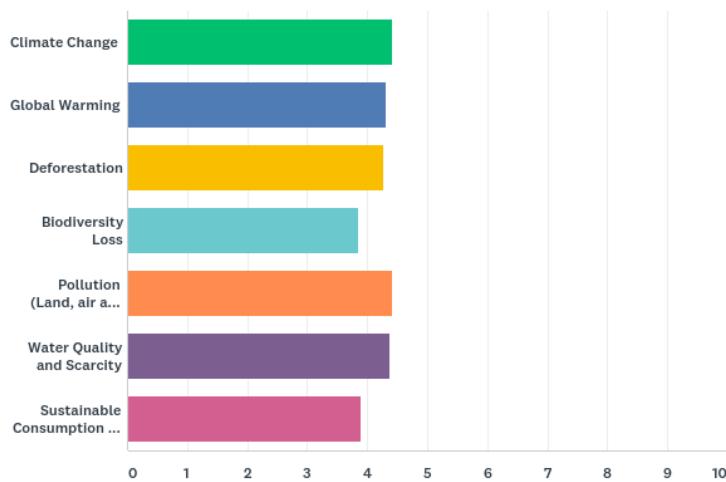


Figure 10: Understanding of environmental issues

*RQ: I personally have a good understanding of what each of the following environmentally responsible practices are.*

This question asked about public relations practitioners' self-assessed level of knowledge on environmentally responsible practices from the list of ten highlighted environmental topics. Practitioners feel they know the most about conserving water (4.37), recycling (4.26) and reducing waste (4.16). They feel they know the least about offsetting energy usage (3.26) and lowering greenhouse gas emissions (3.89). See figure 11. Compared to the US survey, recycling and waste reduction, as well as energy efficiency is high, while offsetting energy usage and green packaging is low.

Q13 I personally have a good understanding of what each of the following environmentally responsible practices are.

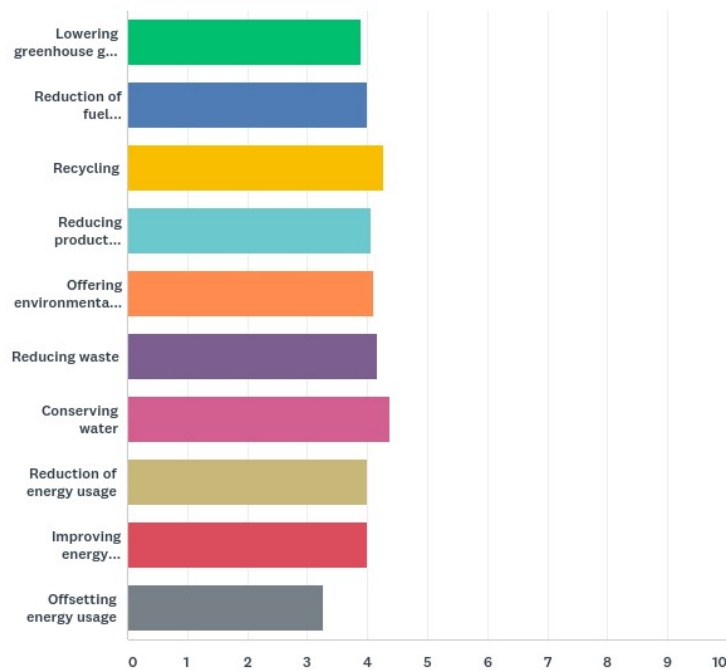


Figure 11: Understanding of environmentally responsible practices

*RQ: Please indicate from which sources you have learned about environmental issues?*

Respondents were asked to indicate the sources from which they learned about environmental issues from a list of ten items. Results indicate that websites (78.95 percent) along with social media platforms (73.68 percent) are key sources of information. Reading newspapers, magazines and talking with colleagues, family and friends are also considered to be productive sources of information about environmental issues. The least likely to be used was classes at a college or university (15.79 percent). See figure 12.

Q12 Please indicate from which sources you have learned about environmental issues? (Tick all that apply)

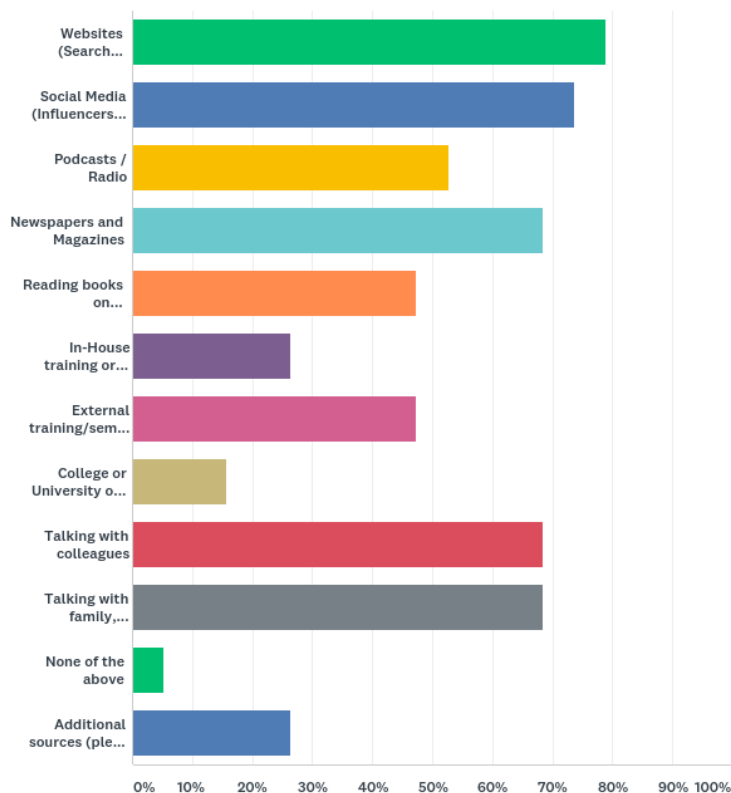


Figure 12: Sources of information

The survey included an open-ended question asking for other sources used by practitioners to educate themselves about these issues. The responses mostly include television programmes (investigative shows, such as Carte Blanche), training on environmental journalism, secondary school, through the Discovery medical aid company communication and even nature itself.

According to Bortree (2011b:11), results indicate that reading and watching the news is the most productive source, along with websites and talking with colleagues. The least likely to be used is classes at a college or university (Bortree, 2011b:11).

### 5.6.6 Current practitioner general environmental beliefs and environmental attitudes

RQ: *The statements that reflect pro-environmental attitudes include items 1,3,5,7,9,11,13,15.* These eight odd-numbered items are worded so that agreement indicates a pro-ecological view.



Based on research regarding the NEP, it is clear that individuals that score higher on all odd numbered statements display a higher pro-environmental attitude. It is clear from the data that all respondents reflect a high pro-environmental attitude. All eight odd numbered items (1,3,5,7,9,11,13,15) scored over 4.00 on the five-point scale. See figure 13.

The survey highlighted that 84.21 percent of respondents believe that (1) we are approaching the limit of the number of people the earth can support, and that (3) when humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences. Data also show that 89.48 percent of respondents believe that (5) humans are seriously abusing the environment, and 89.47 percent believe that (7) plants and animals have as much right as humans to exist. The highest scoring statement was that (9) despite our special abilities, humans are still subject to the laws of nature (94.74 percent). Many respondents believe that (11) the earth is like a spaceship with very limited room and resources (89.47 percent) and (13) the balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset (89.47 percent). A staggering 94.73 percent of respondents believe that (15) if things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe.

RQ: *The statements that reflect anti-environmental attitudes include items 2,4,6,8,10,12,14.* These seven even-numbered items are worded so that disagreement indicates a pro-ecological worldview.

The weighted average for all seven even-numbered items that reflect an anti-environmental attitude was well below the weighted average of 3.00. With regard to the statement asking respondents to rate the degree to which they believe that (2) humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs, 47.37 percent disagreed. Almost half of the respondents reacted neutral to the statement that (4) human ingenuity will ensure that we do not make the earth unliveable. Where 42.11 percent of respondents were unsure, 31.58 percent believed human ingenuity will ensure our survival on earth, while 26.32 percent believed it would not.

The survey results show that 78.94 percent of respondents believe that (6) the earth has plenty of natural resources if we just learn how to develop them. The weighted average of 3.89 is the highest of the anti-environmental attitude items listed. In contrast to this, 84.21 percent of respondents do not agree with the statement that (8) the balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impact of modern industrial nations. This was the lowest weighted average on the five point scale at 1.95. 68.43 percent of practitioners do not

believe that (10) the so-called “ecological crisis” facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated. When asked if (12) humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature, respondents were split evenly with 47.37 percent agreeing that humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature and 47.37 percent disagreeing with the statement. Only a small percent of respondents (5.26 percent) were unsure. (14) Finally, the results from the statement that humans will eventually learn enough about how nature works to be able to control it, saw 47.37 percent of respondents in disagreement with the statement and a high percent of respondents that were unsure (31.58 percent). See figure 13.

Q10 The following questions relate to the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) Scale and will explore your general environmental beliefs and attitude towards the environment:

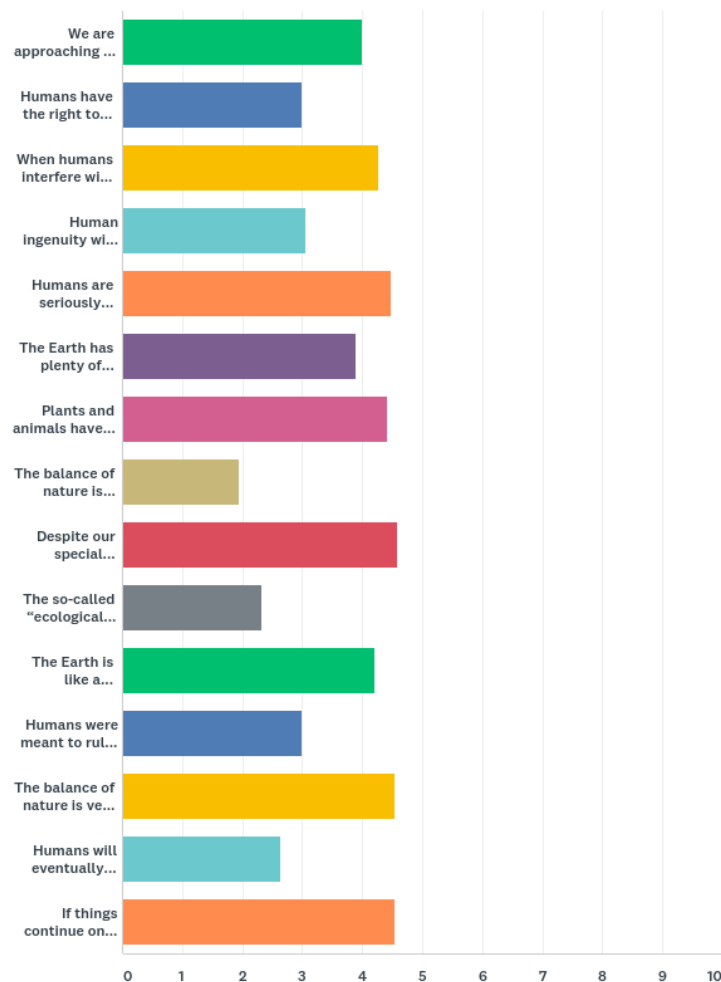


Figure 13: New Ecological Paradigm Scale

### 5.6.7 Shift in environmental attitudes and behaviour change

*RQ: Have you been involved in any campaigns that deal with environmental impact or behaviour change, e.g. #banthestrav, Spar's Say No to Plastic, Day Zero, #Plogging?*

The response to this question was surprisingly low, with 36.84 percent of respondents acknowledging that they have been involved in a specific environmental impact or behaviour change campaign. A total of 63.16 percent of practitioners had not yet been involved in a communication campaign of this kind. See figure 14.

Q3 Have you been involved in any campaigns that deal with environmental impact or behaviour change e.g. #banthestrav, Spar's Say No to Plastic, Day Zero, #Plogging

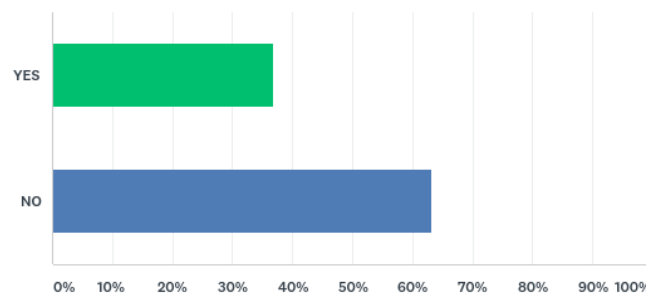


Figure 14: Environmental impact or behaviour change campaigns

*RQ: If yes, could you tell us in one sentence, what was the goal of the environmental impact or behaviour change communication campaign, e.g. to reduce the use of plastic bags?*

The feedback received from practitioners regarding the goal of their environmental impact or behavioural change communication campaign seems to be mainly focussed on plastic-free campaigns to use less plastic bags, introduction of a plastic levy or paying for plastic bags in shops, banning or reducing use of plastic straws, reducing use of plastic bottles, clean-ups, recycling initiatives (e.g. finding cost-effective and alternative items for giveaways), conserving water, desalination plants, equipping delegates on messaging around environmental impact and sensitising employees to the environmental impacts of mining and extending the mining industry's "zero harm" concept to the environment.

*RQ: Did you achieve your environmental impact or behavioural change goal?*

Based on the communication campaign and goals associated with the campaign, respondents were asked if they believe their environmental impact or behaviour change goal was met. 85.71 percent of respondents state that they have reached their goal. See figure 15.

Q6 Did you achieve your environmental impact or behaviour change goal?

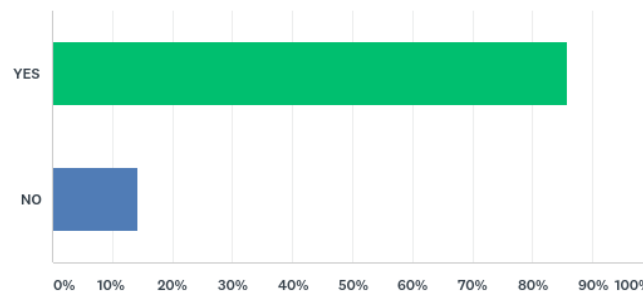


Figure 15: Achievement of environmental impact or behaviour change goal

Some respondents indicate goals were achieved by means of reduced water usage in branches, awareness of the desalination option was increased and honours students fully completed and created a plastic change project that aligns with the 2030 sustainability goals. The number of voluntary reports on environmental deviations as a result of the desensitise and awareness campaign increased more than tenfold, allowing management to take more preventative and corrective action.

One respondent, however, felt that they had not achieved their goal owing to cost and a lack of overall buy-in, two factors that were highlighted in this study as barriers to intent to take action and engage in PEB.

*RQ: Regardless of the success of the campaign, do you believe that a shift in attitude took place?*

To determine the impact of the environmental campaign to see if a shift in environmental attitude and behaviour change took place as a result of communication as a tool, participants were asked to rate the degree to which they believe a shift took place. The survey data reveals that 71.43 percent of practitioners believe that a shift in attitude took

place, one that influenced their intended target audience to change behaviour or take action. See figure 16.

Q9 Regardless of the success of the campaign, do you believe that a shift in attitude took place?

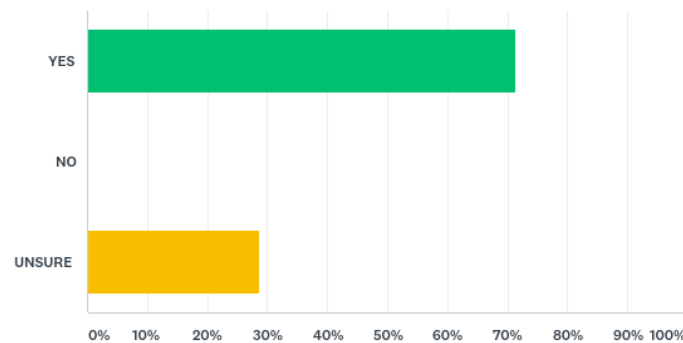


Figure 16: Shift in attitude

This confirms the hypothesis that *“public relations consultants and communication professionals are in a unique position to shift environmental attitudes and influence pro-environmental behaviour so that change takes place, whereby being environmentally responsible will become the ‘norm’, and not just ‘compliance driven’ because of a policy, code, law or for a competitive edge”*.

The researcher notes that it is unclear how respondents measured a shift in environmental attitude and behaviour change, other than respondents who were able to prove a shift in environmental attitude through seeing a reduction in their organisation’s water usage and increase of reports. It would be recommended to include a question on how the shift in attitude was measured in future research.

#### 5.6.8 Level of transparency of a company’s environmental impact

Practitioners were asked about the degree to which organisations are communicating transparently about environmental issues.

*RQ: My company provides useful information about its environmental behaviours to key publics for making informed decisions.*

One of the key aspects of transparency is providing information that is truthful and useful for stakeholders and customer-publics. The results of the questionnaire show that almost 60 percent of respondents either do not think their company is providing this information (31.58 percent) or are unsure whether their organisation is providing useful information to key publics (26.32 percent). Only 42.11 percent of respondents agree that their organisation is providing useful information. See figure 17.

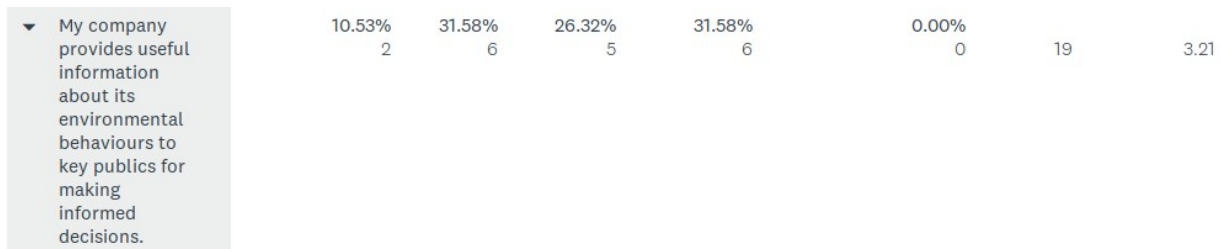


Figure 17: Useful information

*RQ: I think my company wants to be accountable to key publics and therefore communicates transparently about its impact on the environment.*

According to a five-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree, practitioners were asked to rate the degree to which they believe their company to be communicating transparently about its environmental impact according to the five-point scale. A considerable 47.37 percent of respondents believe their company to be transparent about their environmental activities. See figure 18.

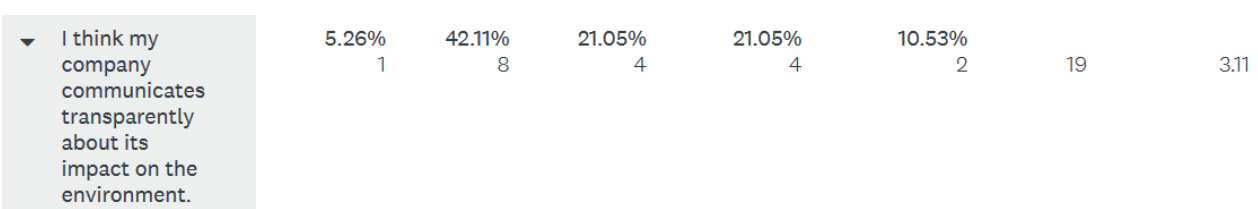


Figure 18: Organisation's level of transparency

*RQ: I think most other companies communicate transparently about their impact on the environment.*

When it comes to practitioners rating other companies or competitors, only 15.79 percent believe companies are being transparent. A strong 42.1 percent of respondents felt that most other companies are not being fully transparent about their impact on the

environment, while the other 42.11 percent were unsure whether other companies are being open about what it is that they say about their environmental impact. See figure 19.

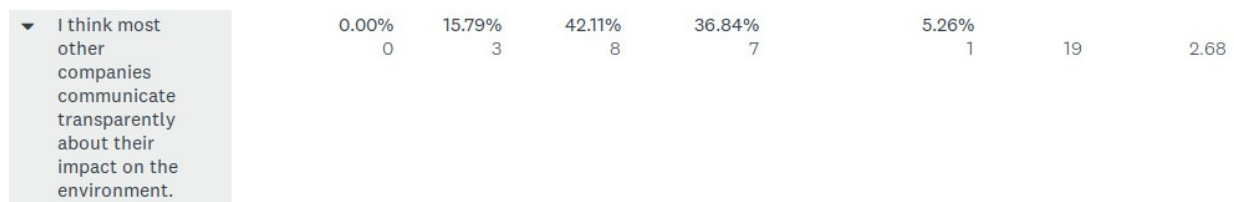


Figure 19: Other companies level of transparency

*RQ: I understand what ‘greenwash’ is and the impact it can have on my organisation.*

To gain a better understanding of respondents’ understanding of “greenwash”, practitioners were asked to rate the degree to which they understood “greenwash” and the impact it has on the organisation. Data shows that 57.9 percent of respondents expressed that they understand what “greenwash” is and the impact it can have while 42.1 percent of respondents were unsure or did not know what “greenwash” is. The researcher notes that, although a higher percent may understand “greenwash”, the other 42.1 percent of public relations practitioners is not aware or do not have an understanding of “greenwash”, which is still high. This lack of knowledge of “greenwashing” could potentially result in misleading, inaccurate or false claims taking place. See figure 20.

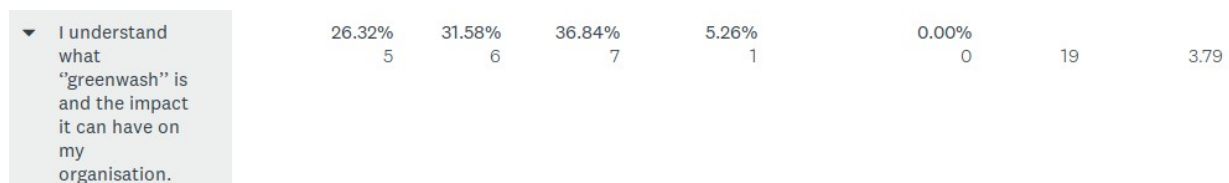


Figure 20: Understanding of “Greenwash”

### 5.6.9 Practitioner perception regarding environmentally responsible behaviours on reputation and bottom-line

*RQ: I feel that my company could benefit financially from engaging in more environmentally responsible behaviours.*

According to a five-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree, practitioners were asked to rate their perception that their organisation could benefit financially from engaging in more environmentally responsible behaviours. Results indicated that 78.95 percent of respondents felt that their company could benefit. See figure 21.

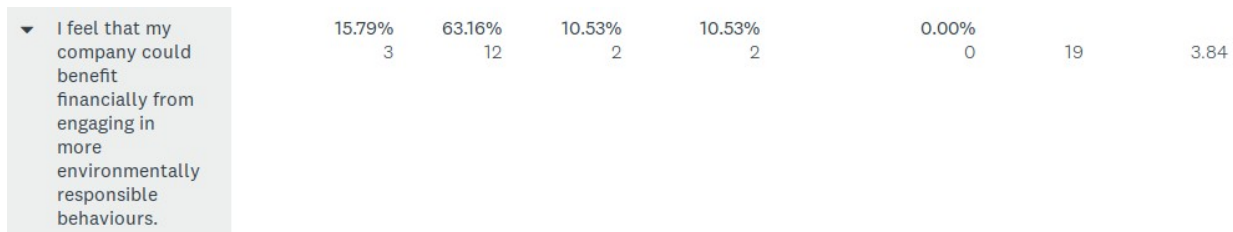


Figure 21: Perceived financial benefit from environmentally responsible behaviour

*RQ: I feel that my company's reputation would benefit from engaging in more environmentally responsible behaviours.*

The degree to which practitioners believe their organisation's reputation could benefit from more environmentally responsible behaviours was a resounding 89.47 percent. See figure 22.

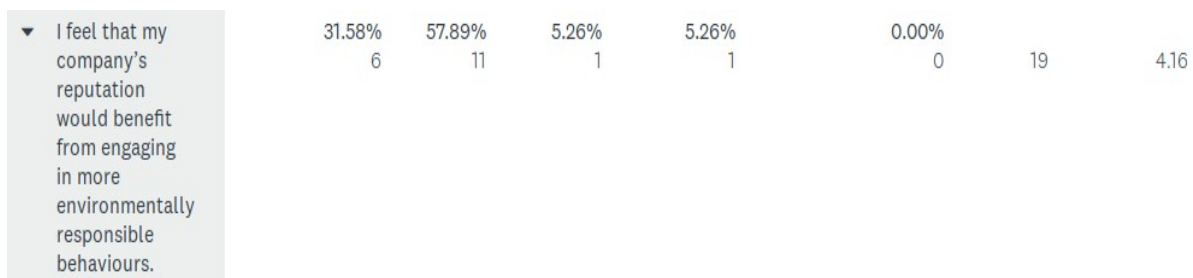


Figure 22: Perceived reputation benefit from environmentally responsible behaviour



## Chapter 6: Main Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

### 6.1 Summary of findings

As indicated under section 1.2 the research objective of the study is to understand the current state of environmental communication in South Africa. In order to explore national communication efforts regarding environmental messages, the intended audience of this study was public relations practitioners and communication professionals that are members of the professional body of PRISA. This study aimed to address the hypothesis that *“through the process of managing how, when and in what way we communicate, public relations consultants and communication professionals are in a unique position to shift environmental attitudes and influence pro-environmental behaviour (PEB) so that a change takes place whereby being environmentally responsible will become the ‘norm’ and not just ‘compliance driven’ because of a policy, code or law or for a competitive edge”*.

Using data collected in a national online survey of members of PRISA, the study examined how and in what way organisations communicate about their environmental impacts and practices, including the topics organisations communicate about, the channels used to deliver the environmental messages and the publics most often targeted with these messages. The study also examined the characteristics of public relations practitioners and communication professionals tasked with communicating these “green messages” to stakeholders, including the demographic profile of practitioners, level of environmental knowledge, as well as general environmental attitudes and beliefs amongst practitioners.

The respondent group was predominantly female, with only 42.11 percent being male. This neither proves or disproves the socio-demographic research that gender plays a role in PEB, as all respondents scored highly on the NEP scale. A majority of respondents have been employed in public relations for ten or more years with almost 60 percent holding managerial or director job titles. Over half the respondents are also APR and CPRP accredited through PRISA. Over 50 percent of respondents had a high educational background and high income to match their knowledge level in the public relations field. Almost 40 percent of respondents work for a corporate entity, and a smaller percentage works in a public relations firm or agency.

Practitioners seem to have a good understanding of some key environmental issues, including climate change, land, air and water pollution and water scarcity; however, they were least knowledgeable on issues of biodiversity, sustainability consumption and production. Whether they are knowledgeable on the complexities and technical processes behind these issues is unknown. Respondents also show a good understanding regarding environmentally responsible practices, believing they know the most about conserving water, recycling and reducing waste, and least about offsetting energy usage and lowering greenhouse gas emissions, which might be more “technical” in nature. Examples include emission statistics and key measurements of a carbon footprint analysis. Practitioners’ priorities regarding their organisation equalled their understanding of environmentally responsible practices, with conserving water, recycling and reducing waste being top priorities. They also acknowledge that they are least likely to communicate about fuel consumption and lowering greenhouse gas emissions and believe that these should be included as part of a company’s environmental priorities. Interestingly, respondents suggest including communication and education awareness programmes as an environmentally responsible practice.

Results show that websites and social media platforms are the key source of environmental information for practitioners, followed by reading the news and talking with family, friends and colleagues. The least likely source of information was universities and colleges, which confirms that practitioners have little to no technical training relating to complex environmental issues, processes and practices. This ties in with the low levels of knowledge of technical processes and environmentally responsible practices. Research shows that online information is not necessarily accurate and many media stories include environmental framing and sensationalism.

Almost half of the practitioners that completed the questionnaire use the company website and employee newsletter as key channels of communication to communicate “green stories”. This is followed in popularity by press releases and social media channels. The channels they use are unclear. In addition, annual reports and workplace media, i.e. posters, were included over and above the list supplied, confirming that communication is still essentially technocentric.

The data confirms that the main target audience of intended “green” messaging is employees, followed by customer-publics. The least likely target audiences include activists and government, which, according to Cox (2010), play an important role in driving change as these groups can apply increased pressure on companies but are usually not

included in the dialogue or environmental decision-making process. When excluded, the reaction can be extreme activism that is detrimental to a company's reputation and bottom line. Government has the power to change and influence laws so including them in the sustainability decision-making process is vital. In order to garner support and mitigate environmental disasters, all levels of stakeholders should be considered when making environmental decisions. The research also includes additional target audiences not listed, including clients and community as intended target audiences. Community participation is particularly important as information gleaned from local individuals could provide valuable insights and could pre-empt or prevent an environmental disaster.

The respondents all rated in the top percentage in terms of reflecting a pro-environmental attitude. Respondents strongly agree that humans are abusing the environment and if they continue on their present course will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe.

Results show that, although respondents scored highly as pro-environmental individuals, 63 percent have not engaged in environmental impact or behaviour change campaigns. Although low, the 85.71 percent of the respondents that had been involved in a campaign of this nature, acknowledged that they had reached their environmental impact or behaviour change communication goals. Just over 70 percent of the respondents believe that a shift in attitude took place as a result of their communication efforts. This proves the hypothesis that communication has the power to shift attitudes.

The number of respondents that scored high on the pro-environmental statements also scored reasonably high on the transparency and trust statements with almost half of respondents believing that their organisation takes accountability seriously and therefore communicates transparently about their environmental impacts. In comparison, approximately 40 percent of respondents are unsure or felt that other companies are not being as transparent as them.

Results show that only a small percentage of respondents believe their organisation is communicating substantial information that is useful and truthful. According to Rawlins (2008), providing substantial information is part of being transparent. It would seem from the responses that, although companies believe they are being transparent, it is not 100 percent the case. Another aspect of transparency is a lack of secrecy, the act of "hiding information away" which is the same as "greenwashing". Although a high percentage of respondents expressed their understanding of "greenwash", there is still a relatively high percentage (42.1 percent) of respondents who are unsure or do not know what

“greenwash” is. This is concerning because companies that green sheen their communications run the risk of irreparable brand damage and negative publicity and loss of stakeholder trust and confidence.

Research shows that the more a company communicates their environmental initiatives, the better they are seemingly perceived by the public and in some way earn environmental legitimacy. In order to increase their reputation, better connect with stakeholders and become a stronger link in the supply chain, companies may increase communication of environmental messages and claims. For many companies, it is about the reputation and increasing their bottom line rather than the environment, which is a concern of stakeholders. However, being authentically involved in environmentally responsible practices has also resulted in improving reputation and a company’s bottom line. This aligns with the 78.95 percent of respondents who feel that their company could benefit financially from engaging in more environmentally responsible behaviours and the 89.47 percent that believe this would enhance the organisation’s reputation.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

A few major themes that emerged from this study are detailed in the following sections.

### **6.2.1 Stakeholder engagement, sustained dialogue and participation**

Most of the channels used to communicate environmental messages are technocentric one-way communication models that leave little space for stakeholders to engage with the organisation, rather than two-way communication that involves feedback from the receiver to the sender, such as face-to-face, email, telephone, chat rooms, instant messaging and in-person communication. It can be concluded that practitioners are still focusing a key portion of their communication on one-way communication channels with a focus on company websites, employee newsletters and press releases. Social media is included but the level of engagement is not clear. Practitioner’s audiences are not fully inclusive, with activists and government audiences rating low on the target audience scale. In addition, the researcher omitted to include local community as a target audience. Local communities are vitally important as a local knowledge source and can pre-empt or prevent a natural disaster. This confirms the lack of stakeholder engagement, dialogue and participation as highlighted as a key research problem, as well as confirms that

stakeholder needs are not taken fully into account and that the focus is still on telling versus listening.

### **6.2.2 Increased understanding of environmental issues and processes**

As highlighted in the study, environmental understanding is crucial when it comes to communicating accurately and effectively to stakeholders. However, communicators tasked with communicating scientific and technical jargon to laymen are often lacking in knowledge of complex environmental issues, technical processes and environmentally responsible practices. This can often lead to inaccurate messaging being communicated, which can be construed as “greenwashing”. Respondents are fairly knowledgeable on environmental issues that have recently been top of the South African and global agenda, including water scarcity, waste reduction and plastic pollution. However, when it comes to more technical and complex issues, such as biodiversity, greenhouse gas emissions, sustainable consumption and production, as well as knowledge of energy reduction, offsetting and efficiency, the respondents scored very low on their understanding of these issues and process. The sources from which information and knowledge about environmental issues is gleaned are websites and social media, followed by talking to colleagues, friends and family. As highlighted earlier, information on the internet can often be inaccurate and misleading. It is clear from the data that practitioners have not received any formal and technical training from colleges or workshops.

### **6.2.3 Increased transparency when communicating environmental impacts**

It can be concluded that distrust is still high amongst stakeholders. Respondents to the survey stated that they are unsure or disagree that most companies are being transparent about their environmental impact. Part of transparency is being accountable for actions and being open and honest about what is communicated. Respondents scored quite low in these areas, with many unsure or believing that their organisations were not providing stakeholders with useful information with which to make informed decisions. With the rise of green stories coupled with the increase of green claims, many of which cannot be verified, a shocking 42 percent of respondents were unsure or did not know what “greenwashing” was. The inconsistencies between companies’ actual behaviour and their

“green claims” is considered “greenwashing” and can lead to serious reputational damage, loss of stakeholder trust and lack of confidence between organisation and stakeholders.

#### **6.2.4 Plain, understandable language**

It is clear from the secondary research analysis that language plays a vital role in the communication of environmental messages. In Chapter 2, the CPA (RSA, 2008c) makes it clear that product labels or descriptions of goods are to be communicated in plain language and that the information be accurate and not misleading or deceptive (The Consumer Protection Act Protects the Environment Too, 2011). Promoting messages in a clear and understandable way is important for environmental education and awareness. Being able to interpret sustainability and environmental information, especially environmental information or claims that are scientific or technical in nature, enables better understanding and helps consumers to be informed when making decisions whether to buy a product or support a company. If knowledge, education and literacy levels are low, these can become a barrier to shifting environmental attitudes and stakeholders engaging more frequently in PEB.

#### **6.2.5 Understanding and measuring general environmental attitudes**

Another key theme that emerged from this study is the importance of understanding the general environmental attitudes of individuals and cognitive and situational barriers to PEB, especially in terms of attitudes, social norms and language. Attitudes in particular can influence decisions and play a major role in affecting our actions or behaviour by either increasing or decreasing the quality of environmental actions and behaviour. The current general environmental world-views and attitudes of individuals can influence how the information received from stakeholders is interpreted. Understanding environmental attitudes can help to streamline and target messaging strategies and provide a clear and specific understanding of stakeholders’ environmental consciousness and concerns.

It can be concluded that based on the study and the results of the survey, the hypothesis that “through the process of managing how, when and in what way we communicate, public relations consultants and communication professionals are in a unique position to shift environmental attitudes and influence PEB so that a change takes place whereby

being environmentally responsible will become the 'norm' and not just 'compliance driven' because of a policy, code or law or for a competitive edge" can be proven.

From the data gleaned from the survey when respondents were asked to comment on environmental impact and behaviour change communication campaigns, it was proven that practitioners believe that their behaviour change communication campaign goals were achieved and that a shift in environmental attitudes took place as a result of communication. However, how these attitudes were measured is inconclusive and further research would be required to determine if behavioural changes took place.

In conclusion, the results of this study show that communicators have immense power to shift attitudes and influence behaviour. However, communication of complex environmental issues and environmentally responsible practices requires technical training and understanding, which is lacking in the public relations industry. It also requires the moving away from one-way communication channels and the creating and sustaining of stakeholder relations in order to identify needs and concerns, as well as the current understanding of environmental attitudes and beliefs to environmental issues. The lack of knowledge and many respondents being unsure of what "greenwashing" is and the impact it can have on a company means they risk widening the attitude-behaviour gap by potentially misleading consumers with environmental claims that are false, deceptive, ambiguous and inaccurate. This is potentially dangerous as it can lead to negative publicity and loss of stakeholder trust and confidence. Not engaging with, or taking the legitimate concerns and needs of stakeholders into account, not being transparent and not providing stakeholders with substantial information that is truthful can also prevent stakeholders from making informed decisions. Not only do companies run the risk of losing stakeholder trust and confidence, it will affect the bottom line and can lead to a decrease in environmental behaviours.

In order to be the change they want to see in the world, public relations practitioners and communication professionals need to realise that their role as communicator has changed. Environmental communication is not simply a "green spin" on tired old press releases. It is about sustainable communication as a continuous-results driven process of creating and sustaining long-term sustainable relationships between the organisation and its customer-publics (Harrison, 1993:323-327). Public relations can play a positive role in sustainable development and sustainable communication. Rather than being seen as a short-term fix, public relations should assume a more vital role in creating and sustaining longer-term stakeholder relationships that will benefit the earth, people and the organisation.



## 6.3 Recommendation

### 6.3.1 Legislation regarding misleading environmental claims in South Africa

This study shows that currently no substantial legislation exists to protect publics against misleading environmental claims and the unethical practice of “greenwashing”. The ARB addresses environmental claims in advertising in Section G of their standards, however according to the researcher, these standards fall considerably short of global standards. The researcher plans to approach the ARB in the near future to discuss revising the current standards appearing in Section G in line with global environmental advertising standards. This will require further research and the preparation of a proposal letter to the ARB.

Owing to the fact that the ARB is a self-regulated industry body for the advertising industry imposing legislative penalties for non-compliance is limited, however legislation does exist against unfair, false and misleading marketing and advertising claims such as the CPA that can impose legislative penalties. The researcher recommends that the CPA (RSA, 2008c) looks to including specific environmental claims especially newer claims like “renewable energy” and “carbon neutral” as well as protection against self-declared environmental claims and logos i.e. “Endorsed By Mother Nature”.

The researcher believes that government should better monitor, regulate and enforce penalties for non-compliance in terms of environmentally responsible practices and the communication and marketing of misleading or inaccurate environmental claims. Enforcing penalties and taxes could effectively address environmental challenges, assist with curbing pollution and inefficient technologies and change publics behaviour, however it can also result in strong resistance from publics, especially when it affects their finances or bottom-line. Studies show that this resistance to cost is a key barrier to publics not engaging in PEB (Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14135).

To ensure both compliance and adherence to the law as well as encourage publics to change behaviour or adopt new technology, the researcher recommends considering a two-level strategy– *penalty and reward*. A combination where penalties are enforced for non-compliance and rewards are given to incentivise good environmental stewardship.



Section 3.4.2 of the study shows that tax incentives and rebates have been used successfully by governments in some countries to encourage and change public behaviour. Seemingly, tax incentives in South Africa are made available to businesses and industry and not the general public. The South African government programme used to offer households a tax rebate on the installation of solar water geysers to encourage use of renewable energy but this programme was rescinded a few years ago due to lack of government funds.

There is mention that the National Treasury will publish a draft Environmental Fiscal Reform Policy Paper in 2019 which will outline options to reform existing environmental taxes and consider the role new taxes can play in addressing air pollution and climate change, promoting efficient water use, reducing waste and encouraging improvements in waste management. The government also plans to investigate a tax on single-use plastics including straws, caps, beverage cups and lids, and containers. This is over and above the imminent Carbon Tax which comes into effect on 01 June 2019.

To mitigate further barriers to PEB and to avoid widening the attitude-behaviour gap, the researcher recommends that the government also look at including tax incentives, rebates or rewards for “Good Green Deeds” not just among businesses and industry, but the general public too to encourage a positive approach to responsible environmental behaviour. The researcher also suggests that the onus of the “reward” system should be on both government and businesses. An example of organisations rewarding their customers for being good environmental stewards include Shoprite and Checkers stores who reward customers with 50c off their total purchase when they re-use their Checkers “planet bag”.

The researcher believes there to be a low level of communication regarding environmental incentives like the Checkers “planet bag” campaign, that reward the public for acting in an environmentally responsible way. This lack of communication and awareness in turn results in the public not being able to benefit from these rewards. The researcher believes that public relations practitioners and communication professionals can play a key role in promoting and communicating government and business incentives as well play a key role in informing and educating publics regarding environmental legislation i.e. litter by-law and the consequences thereof as well as further education pertaining to “greenwashing”. Also the consequences thereof, how to identify misleading environmental claims and what legislative or body-industry process to follow when lodging a complaint.

### 6.3.2 Balanced representation of stakeholders and inclusion of key publics

With regard to the survey in this studies target audience, the researcher omitted to include the “local community” which was an oversight as they are a key role player in driving change and providing local knowledge. The researcher thus recommends that public relations practitioners and communication professionals ensure a balanced representation of all possible public-interest groups in a Stakeholder Communication Plan, especially publics such as activist groups, government and schools that might not be directly involved, but who are vital to driving change.

Not including these key publics could lead to grievances or future issues so it is better to keep the right people in the loop where they can be made to feel heard, involved and valued. Without sound public relations, you cannot make money. Effective engagement and dialogue with publics not only enhances the company’s reputation but also increases a company’s bottom line. A balanced representation of key publics will also help public relations practitioners and communication professionals streamline their environmental messages to ensure that it reaches the recipient successfully, helping to shift attitudes and encourage PEB.

A fictitious example of how the researcher believes an effective communication plan can help shift attitudes and encourage PEB: An organisation embarks on a “Save Water” campaign however, over a period of time it is evident that interest and response to the campaign and overall behaviour change to saving water is low. The researcher believes that if the organisation had first engaged with their publics to understand their environmental needs, interests and attitudes before communicating, they would have determined that the majority of the respondents expressed a high environmental attitude and concern for plastic in our oceans that is destroying sea life, rather than saving water. The researcher believes that environmental messaging should run concurrently with both public interest needs and organisations objectives. The researcher suggests that perhaps running a “#PlasticFree” or a recycling initiative to keep plastic out of the ocean initially would be a more effective campaign and would elicit a shift in attitude and encourage behaviour change. If successful, public relations practitioners and communication professionals might build on the trust established and the shift in attitude because of the first campaign and then look at introducing a “Save Water” campaign.

### **6.3.3 Low participation from public relations practitioners in creating Environmental Behaviour Change Communication campaigns**

The survey in this study showed that although respondents expressed a high environmental attitude, many of which strongly agreed that humans are abusing the environment, only a small percentage of respondents have been involved in environmental behaviour change communication campaigns. Survey results showed that 63 percent of respondents who all scored highly as pro-environmental individuals were not engaged in environmental impact or behaviour change campaigns.

In this study, public relations practitioners and communication professionals have been identified as key role players in shifting attitudes and influencing behaviour by means of how, when and in what way they communicate the environmental ethos and actions of companies. This new role provides public relations practitioners and communication professionals with an opportunity to use communication as a tool to shift environmental attitudes and perceptions and help encourage people to adopt a more sustainable and pro-environmental lifestyle. These new roles also presents an opportunity for public relations practitioners and communication professionals to set standards and establish benchmarks for responsible communication.

The researcher recommends an increase in participation with regard to environmental behaviour change communication campaigns from public relations practitioners and communication professionals in order to assume a more vital role in not only creating and sustaining relations with key publics but also educating and guiding industry members in best practice environmental behaviour change communication campaigns. The researcher suggests creating a sharing platform (perhaps LinkedIn) where public relations practitioners can share their environmental behaviour change communication campaigns with others in an effort to use it as a learning tool to help inform, educate, share challenges and provide guidance on best practice.

### **6.3.4 Increased knowledge of environmental issues and processes through education and training**

The survey use in this study revealed that public relations practitioners and communication professionals expressed high environmental attitudes and showed to be fairly knowledgeable on environmental issues, especially those that are high on the South

African and global agenda such as water scarcity and climate change. However, they scored exceedingly low on their understanding of environmentally responsible practices and processes that are more complex or technical in nature such as biodiversity, greenhouse gas emission, energy reduction and offsetting and efficiency.

The survey used in this study also revealed that the use of websites and social media platforms are the key source of environmental information for public relations practitioners and communication professionals, followed by reading the news and talking with family, friends and colleagues. As highlighted in Section 1.1. of the study, information gleaned from websites and social media platforms can often be inaccurate or misleading and lead to further “greenwashing”. Survey data revealed that the least likely source of information was universities and colleges, which the researcher believes, is linked to the low levels of technical and scientific understanding relating to complex environmental issues, processes and practices.

The researcher recommends that communicators wanting to position themselves as knowledgeable in this field attend workshops, events, webinars and training courses specific to environmental issues and practices. Creating community book clubs or reading books by well-known environmental philosophers and scientists where information can be backed up is recommended. Based on the study’s survey and respondent’s suggestions, the researcher also recommends considering communication and education awareness programmes as a standard environmentally responsible practice.

The researcher believes that a fundamental shift in communication training with regard to sustainable environmental communication needs to occur and recommends that including this as a specific subject or as part of the current public relations communication curriculum at university and college level be explored. This knowledge and education should be integrated early on in the communication curriculum at university so that future public relations practitioners and communication professionals are equipped to effectively communicate about environmental issues, verify claims and to mitigate “greenwashing”.

As some institutions might not have the capacity to ‘fit the time in’ for additional subjects, the researcher also suggests a slightly less formal approach to educating through running Sustainable Environmental Communication workshops and webinars through local public relations and communication organisations such as PRISA or business schools. Upon completion of the formal training, workshop or course, the researcher recommends a

reputable, recognised third party training certificate that qualifies them to promote a company's "green story" and environmental claims.

This increased knowledge and additional credibility, lends itself to helping public relations practitioners develop a new skill set and continues the commitment to ongoing and continuous professional development, research and education in the field of public relations. This increased competence and knowledge also provides the public relations practitioner and communication professional with a platform to be an expert spokesperson who can communicate effectively and clearly on environmental issues on behalf of the company, minimising the chances of misleading, false and inaccurate information being communicated.

In order for public relations practitioners and communication professionals to be effective spokespeople on environmental issues, the researcher stresses the importance of including public relations practitioners and communication professionals in the sustainability decision-making process at management level. This will afford them the opportunity to learn and effectively communicate the environmental messages from top management and the organisation to its publics. Being able to communicate effectively, transparently and accurately will help to build trust and instil confidence among the publics.

#### **6.3.5 Develop a "culture of listening" in order to interpret information and provide feedback effectively**

Building trust requires open dialogue whereby the public can be responsive in their engagement with an organisation and vice versa. This responsive engagement includes developing a "culture of listening" which the researcher recommends public relations practitioners and communication professionals adopt as part of their communication strategy.

Listening is one of the most important behaviours to build in a company's culture and an important communication and engagement tool for public relations practitioners and communication professionals. It is an opportunity to "collectively" listen to and react to publics that would not normally be part of a management meeting. It provides an opportunity to identify the legitimate needs and wants of publics, aids in understanding their general environmental attitudes and aids in gathering pertinent information and local

knowledge that top management might not be privy to on the ground that it can help identify and assess current and potential environmental opportunities.

A pertinent element of dialogue-based sustainable environmental communication is being able to “truly hear” what your publics are saying, being able to effectively and accurately interpret their needs and concerns, have the buy-in from top management to incorporate their feedback as part of the sustainability decision-making and communication process and then respond authentically with helpful feedback and more importantly, show the actions taken to “reflect” that they were heard. This builds trust, the key to a successful feedback exchange. In order to keep with the times and abreast of trends, continuous engagement (engage – interpret- feedback) and monitoring of communication strategies is important.

The researcher recommends public relations practitioners and communication professionals research the “Melbourne Mandate” that was released by the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management at the World Public Relations Forum in Melbourne, Australia in 2012. One of the key dimensions of the mandate was to establish a “culture of listening” and engagement in order to create and sustain relations, build trust, be transparent, pursue best practices and to develop a research-based process to identify risks and opportunities.

For many years, one-way communication involved companies speaking and stakeholders listening. Today, it is now important that the company listen while stakeholders speak. A company cannot form a communication strategy until they have listened.

#### **6.3.6 Moving away from one-way techno centric communication towards a two-way mixed communication approach**

Traditionally, communication was defined as one-way dialogue from the source to a receiver and included communication methods such as press releases, company intranet, newsletters and annual or sustainability reports. As discussed in Section 4.2 of the study, this type of communication method is predominately a one-way knowledge-sharing platform leaving little room to listen and engage with publics. This lack of engagement further widens the attitude-behaviour gap, which can lead to a decrease in PEB.

It can be concluded from the studies survey that a key portion of the communication channels used to communicate a company's "green story" are still focussed on one-way communication channels, including the use of company websites, employee newsletters and press releases to communicate environmental messages, confirming that communication is still essentially techno centric.

The researcher suggests that practitioners move away from one-way techno centric communication methods and adopt a two-way communication and sustained dialogue approach with publics. Owing to the fact that people have differing beliefs, interests and needs and will likely act in different ways, a one-size-fits-all communication approach will not be successful. The researcher recommends that public relations practitioners and communication professionals focus their attention on an appropriate mix of communication strategies to reach publics using different communication channels and not just rely on traditional modes of communication.

The researcher recommends foremost that public relations practitioners and communication professionals focus on using communication channels that allow engagement, responses and feedback to create and sustain relations and build trust with key publics. Examples include traditional engagement methods such as the telephone, face-to-face meetings and more online engagement platforms such as messenger chats, instant messaging, emails, social media and LinkedIn groups wherein personal connection is key.

The studies survey did show that after the use of traditional one-way communication methods including website, newsletter and press releases, the use of social media to tell the companies "green story" and to engage with the public was the most popular. The researcher however, is unclear which social media platforms were used as well as how the engagement was measured as the level of engagement was not indicated. The researcher recommends further research into the use of social media as an engagement and communication tool and the effectiveness thereof.

#### **6.3.7 Measurement of shift in environmental attitudes, behaviour change and engagement**

The current general environmental world-views and attitudes of individuals can influence how the information received from stakeholders is interpreted. Attitudes in particular can



influence decisions and play a major role in affecting our actions or behaviour by either increasing or decreasing the quality of environmental actions and behaviour. Understanding environmental attitudes can help to streamline and target messaging strategies and provide a clear and specific understanding of stakeholders' environmental consciousness and concerns.

With regard to participation in environmental behaviour change communication campaigns, many respondents believed that a positive shift in attitude took place as a result of the campaign. However, how the shift in attitude was measured is unclear and inconclusive and should be considered for future research. The researcher recommends including a question asking respondents to indicate the measurement tools or indicators used to prove a shift in attitude took place.

Attitudes are considered to be closely related to behaviour and behaviour-change so the measurement thereof should focus precisely on the attitudes the campaign intends to change, or that are known to be closely linked to the desired behaviour-change. Further research would also be required to determine if behavioural changes took place because of this shift in attitude. Behaviour-change can only be a meaningful measure of success if the campaign requires a call-to-action or asks people to perform a specific behaviour i.e. use less water or electricity, don't use plastic straws or change from plastic bags to cotton bags. Measurement tools that assess whether a person does or does not engage in certain behaviour requires further research. Examples include media monitoring, reporting, direct response tracking such issues as calls to the office, measuring web traffic before and after the campaign and data analytics and indicators showing a change has occurred i.e. reduction of water usage or increase in energy efficiency in an office building.

A recommendation also includes utilising surveys to measure shifts and track behaviour-change. Surveys can provide further insights into public's needs and concerns as well as their interests. Surveys can also provide a measure of general environmental attitudes as indicated in this study with the inclusion of the NEP scale. The researcher recommends that public relations practitioners and communication professionals use pilot study surveys prior to embarking on an environmental behaviour change communication campaign to ascertain awareness, level of knowledge and perception of the organisation. The researcher also believes that it would be worthwhile to conduct surveys during and afterwards to measure how awareness, attitudes and perceptions have changed.



The researcher recommends that the survey conducted in this study “The State of Environmental Communication in South Africa” be further refined and used as part of future stakeholder engagement and sustainable communication strategy plans to help identify the environmental consciousness of a group of stakeholders in order to streamline messages and channels to make the biggest impact and to help shift attitudes to sustainable thinking, preservation and conservation in terms of nature and the environment, which is critical to the well-being of the planet. Including information on the measurement tools used in campaigns would be another arrow in the quiver in the communication toolkit for best practice.

#### **6.3.8 Socio-demographic and situational barriers to PEB**

As identified in the study, there are a number of socio-demographic and situational barriers that could influence PEB. The study shows that overall there are mixed conclusions when it comes to links between PEB and socio-demographic barriers such as income, gender, age and education. The research did show conclusively that situational factors such as income, comfort, convenience and compliance were barriers to PEB. Cost was revealed in both the study and the survey as being one of the biggest barriers to adopting PEB.

The researcher believes that delving deeper into what the current barriers are preventing PEB among individuals should be further explored and perhaps included in future public engagement plans or surveys to glean a better understanding thereof. Understanding these barriers in relation to existing environmental attitudes could further help to tailor-make key messages and refine sustainable environmental communication strategies further to address the barriers and create messages to shift attitudes.

#### **6.3.9 Concept of poverty and its relationship to PEB**

Traditionally, it is believed, that environmental concern was seen as a luxury for wealthy people. In post-apartheid South Africa, the majority of South Africans do not earn a living wage and live below the Upper-Bound Poverty Line or “bread line”. Within the South African context, poverty is a key development challenge in social, economic and political terms and alleviating poverty is central to government policies. On a global scale, the eradication of poverty is foremost the most challenging and important goal that falls under the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

With so many people living below the “bread line”, meeting the most basic human needs is a struggle and so becomes a key priority. Having little or no income also limits access to education and therefore lesser wealth. The focus is then mainly on physiological needs to survive rather than be concerned with allocating time and resources to other issues like climate change and pollution. Environmental protection becomes a secondary concern.

Studies show that social upbringing, culture, values and priorities are among some of the factors that influences decision-making and guides individual actions (Bagchi *et al.*, 2015:78). Factors such as income and education play a vital role in PEB. Section 3.4.1.3 of the study reveal that the higher the income and education the greater the knowledge and with that awareness of environmental issues is increased along with the concern and responsibility to engage in PEB behaviour. Therefore, possessing a higher living-wage and higher-level education status might afford people the opportunity to engage more in certain environmental behaviour (Bronfman *et al.*, 2015:14138).

If access to income and education is limited and environmental concern is not a value or priority, then engagement to PEB will be decreased. The researcher believes that as public relations practitioners and communication professionals, the question “what role can communication play in shifting attitudes and influencing behaviour change when environmental protection is not a concern?” should be asked.

Understanding that education and income are barriers, being able to adapt communication messages to incorporate these barriers is key. In order to minimise the barriers that might exist due to a lack of education including low levels of literacy, the researcher recommends that public relations practitioners and communication professionals communicate in a language that is clear and understandable and investigate using channels of communication specially targeted to these publics.

For many, access to internet and Wi-Fi is limited, so engaging with these publics via social media platforms, through website or even on TV might be limiting. The researcher suggests using more traditional methods such as newspapers and radio as well as a two-way mixed communication approach to engagement such as face-to-face meetings, theatre productions, poetry or music, roadshows, photographs, illustrations and videos. Using a language translator to communicate the message is also an effective method to help communicate effectively and promote understanding.

For a more accurate presentation that reflects the relevance of poverty on environmental attitudes and behaviour of South Africa, the researcher suggests that a better

understanding of the role of poverty in relation to PEB should be further explored and not be omitted from future studies regarding sustainable environmental communication, especially in a country like South Africa where cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity is high.

#### **6.3.10 State of Environmental Communication Handbook**

Based on the initial survey conducted, the researcher would like to consider working with a recognised university or academic institution to compile an annual “State of Environmental Communication” handbook for the public relations, advertising and marketing industry. The aim of such a handbook is to provide the public relations discipline with a better understanding of the way organisations are practising or communicating about environmental responsibility, to help keep public relations practitioners and communication professionals and corporates abreast of environmental legislation changes, share best practices and behaviour change communication case studies and provide continuous updates on latest behaviour change measurement and monitoring tools available. This understanding of the current state of environmental communication amongst public relations practitioners and communication professionals could prove to be an invaluable tool.

#### **6.4 From the researcher**

As public relations practitioners and communication professionals, we have immense power to shift environmental attitudes and influence PEB through the process of managing how, when and in what way we communicate. The actions behind our words will be the catalyst to environmental change. I conclude this study asking the same question I started with, “How many of us are prepared to change the way Mahatma Gandhi changed in order to make a difference to the world?” I am prepared to be the change I want to see in the world – are you?

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## **Annexure 1: Questionnaire**



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jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

## State of Environmental Communication in South Africa

A survey conducted among members of the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA)

	This survey is aimed at PR practitioners and communication professionals working within <i>organisations</i> (company or agency) that communicates or engages in environmental impact or behaviour change communication campaigns or environmentally responsible practices.					
	<b>The following questions relate to environmental impact or behaviour change communication campaigns your organisation has been involved in:</b>					
1.	Have you been involved in any campaigns that deal with environmental impact or behaviour change e.g. #banthestrav, Spar's Say No to Plastic, Day Zero, #Plogging	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>			
2.	If yes, could you tell us in one sentence, what was the goal of the environmental impact or behaviour change communication campaign e.g. to reduce the use of plastic bags? _____					
2a	Would you like to expand and tell us in a few words what your campaign was about? (optional) _____					
3.	Did you achieve your environmental impact or behaviour change goal?	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>			
3a	If yes, please would you like to expand on this and tell us in a few words how your goal was achieved? (optional) _____					
3b	If no, would you like to expand on this and tell us in a few words what barriers or problems did you encounter? (optional) _____					
4.	Regardless of the success of the campaign, do you believe that a shift in attitude took place?	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>UNSURE</b>		

	<b>The following questions relate to the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) Scale and will explore your general environmental beliefs and attitude towards the environment:</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	We are approaching the limit of the number of people the Earth can support.					
2.	Humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs.					
3.	When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences.					
4.	Human ingenuity will insure that we do not make the Earth unlivable.					
5.	Humans are seriously abusing the environment.					
6.	The Earth has plenty of natural resources if we just learn how to develop them.					
7.	Plants and animals have as much right as humans to exist.					
8.	The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impacts of modern industrial nations.					
9.	Despite our special abilities, humans are still subject to the laws of nature.					
10.	The so-called "ecological crisis" facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated.					
11.	The Earth is like a spaceship with very limited room and resources.					
12.	Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature.					
13.	The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset.					
14.	Humans will eventually learn enough about how nature works to be able to control it.					
15.	If things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe.					

	<b>The following questions explore your current knowledge and understanding of environmental issues and environmentally responsible practices:</b>					
1.	<b>I personally have a good understanding of what each of the following environmental issues are.</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	Climate Change					
	Global Warming					
	Deforestation					
	Biodiversity Loss					
	Pollution (Land, air and water)					

	Water Quality and Scarcity					
	Sustainable Consumption and Production					
	<i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2.	<b>Please indicate from which sources you have learned about environmental issues? (Tick all that apply)</b>	Tick the box				
	Websites (Search Engines, Blogs, Online Resources etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Social Media (Influencers, company, organisations)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Podcasts / Radio	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Newspapers and Magazines	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Reading books on environmental issues	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	In-House training or seminars	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	External training/seminars/workshops or conferences	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	College or University or Online Webinars, Courses, Certifications	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Talking with colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Talking with family, children or friends	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	<i>Additional sources</i> _____	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	<i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3.	<b>I personally have a good understanding of what each of the following environmentally responsible practices are.</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	Lowering greenhouse gas emissions					
	Reduction of fuel consumption					
	Recycling					
	Reducing product packaging					
	Offering environmentally-responsible products or services					
	Reducing waste					
	Conserving water					
	Reduction of energy usage					
	Improving energy efficiency					

	Offsetting energy usage					
	<i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

	<b>Within the context of your work environment, the following questions relate to your perceptions of environmentally responsible practices in your <i>organisation</i> (company or agency).</b>					
1.	<b>My organisation makes a priority of these environmentally responsible practices.</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	Lowering greenhouse gas emissions					
	Reduction of fuel consumption					
	Recycling					
	Reducing product packaging					
	Offering environmentally-responsible products or services					
	Reducing waste					
	Conserving water					
	Reduction of energy usage					
	Improving energy efficiency					
	Offsetting energy usage					
	<i>Other _____</i>					
	<i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2.	<b>In my opinion my organisation SHOULD make a priority of these environmentally responsible practices.</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	Lowering greenhouse gas emissions					
	Reduction of fuel consumption					
	Recycling					
	Reducing product packaging					
	Offering environmentally-responsible products or services					
	Reducing waste					

	Conserving water					
	Reduction of energy usage					
	Improving energy efficiency					
	Offsetting energy usage					
	<i>Other</i> _____					
	<i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3.	<b>My organisation has communicated about its activities in these areas through the following channels. (Tick all that apply)</b>	Tick the box				
	Press Release	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	TV and Radio Interview	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Company Website	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Employee Newsletter	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Sustainability Report	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Company Blog and/or Newsletter	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Vimeo etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Webinars	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Special Events/Meetings/Conferences/Exhibitions	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Printed Material	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	<i>Other</i> _____	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	<i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4.	<b>The following audiences are most commonly the target of my organisation's environmental communication. (Tick all that apply)</b>	Tick the box				
	Customer-Publics	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Employees	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Activists	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Shareholders	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Government	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Media	<input type="checkbox"/>				

	Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	None of the above	<input type="checkbox"/>	

	To what degree is your organisation communicating transparently about environmental issues?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	My company considers itself to be “green.”					
2.	I feel that my company could benefit financially from engaging in more environmentally responsible behaviours.					
3.	I feel that my company’s reputation would benefit from engaging in more environmentally responsible behaviours.					
4.	My company provides useful information about its environmental behaviours to key publics for making informed decisions.					
5.	I think my company communicates transparently about its impact on the environment.					
6.	I think most other companies communicate transparently about their impact on the environment.					
7.	I understand what “greenwash” is and the impact it can have on my organisation.					

	Thinking outside of your organisation, the following questions explore your perception of environmentally responsible practices through the lens of....					
1.	<b>In my opinion MOST LARGE CORPORATIONS make a priority of these characteristics of environmental responsibility</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	Lowering greenhouse gas emissions					
	Reduction of fuel consumption					
	Recycling					
	Reducing product packaging					
	Offering environmentally-responsible products or services					
	Reducing waste					



	Conserving water					
	Reduction of energy usage					
	Improving energy efficiency					
	Offsetting energy usage					
	Other _____					
	None of the above	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2.	<b>ACTIVISTS (defined as members of activist organizations – World Wildlife Foundation, Greenpeace, Sierra Club, etc.) believe most large corporations make a priority of these characteristics of environmental responsibility.</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	Lowering greenhouse gas emissions					
	Reduction of fuel consumption					
	Recycling					
	Reducing product packaging					
	Offering environmentally-responsible products or services					
	Reducing waste					
	Conserving water					
	Reduction of energy usage					
	Improving energy efficiency					
	Offsetting energy usage					
	Other _____					
	None of the above	<input type="checkbox"/>				

	<b>The following questions will help identify the link between environmental attitudes and participant demographics and classification:</b> <b>Please note that all personal information will remain anonymous.</b>					
1.	<b>Which of the following industries best describes the work of your organisation? (Tick all that apply)</b>	Tick the box				
	Agency/Public Relations Firm	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Association/Non-profit	<input type="checkbox"/>				

	Corporate	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Education (Counselling)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Education (Teaching)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Financial Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Food/Beverage	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Government/Municipal/Military	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Health/Medical/Pharmaceutical	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	International/Multicultural	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Manufacturing/Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Professional Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Public Relations Consultant	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Sports/Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Travel/Tourism/Hospitality	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<i>Other</i> _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2.	<b>What is the approximate number of employees at your organisation? (Please tick one box)</b>	Tick the box	
	Under 10	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	11-50	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	50-200	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	201-500	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	501-1000	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	1001+	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3.	<b>Which category best describes your title? (Please tick one box)</b>	Tick the box	
	Managing Director	<input type="checkbox"/>	

	Account Director	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Account Manager	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Account Executive	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Account Assistant	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Intern or student	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Specialist, Strategist, Consultant, Associate	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4.	<b>How many years have you been employed by this company? _____</b>	Dropdown	Scale	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
5.	<b>For how many years have you been employed in the public relations discipline or a closely related discipline? _____</b>	Dropdown	Scale	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
6.	<b>Which level of registration have you received from PRISA?(Please tick one box)</b>	Tick the box				
	APR (Accredited Public Relations Practitioner +10 years)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	CPRP (Chartered Public Relations Practitioner 6 -10 years)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	PRP (Public Relations Practitioner 3 - 6 years)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Affiliate (1-3 years)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Student or learner	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7.	<b>What is your highest level of education? (Please tick one box)</b>	Tick the box				
	High School	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Undergraduate Degree (Certificate, Diploma and National Diploma)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Postgraduate Degree (Bachelors, Honours, Masters, Doctorate)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Prefer not to answer	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8.	<b>What best describes your salary? (Please tick one box)</b>	Tick the box				

	Under R10,000	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	R10,001 to R15,000	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	R15,001 to R20,000	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	R20,001 to R25,000	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	R25,001 to R35,000	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	R35,001 to R50,000	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	R50,001 to R65,000	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	R65,001 to R75,000	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Over R75,000	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Prefer not to answer	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9.	<b>What gender are you? (Please tick one box)</b>	Tick the box				
	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Other (specify) _____					
	Prefer not to answer					
10.	<b>Where do you live? (Please tick one box)</b>	Tick the box				
	Large city (e.g. Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Small city or town (e.g. Port Elizabeth, Pretoria, East London)					
	Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Many thanks for completing the survey.					